

# 12

## The thirteenth and fourteenth generations

**The 13<sup>th</sup> generation is my father's generation. By this time, the continued branching of the family tree and the prolificacy of the descendants of the red line meant that in the same generation there were family members born in different periods.**

**The most prominent figure is Carlo, the son of Piero, of the Valmadrera branch, who founded a business activity in a new field, which was then considerably expanded by his son Riccardo.**

**The others are not of any outstanding importance, but through them I have put together an extensive biography of my father. This was for the sake of accentuating the characters of the period in which he lived and also because, independently of my own special affection for him, there is a certain difference between his biography and that of the others: despite the fact that he was a scion of a great dynasty of industrialists, my father had neither the character nor the makings of an industrialist – a fact he always regretted.**

**My father's biography is replete with an entire collection of anecdotes, some of which are his own, as well as several writings from my mother, thereby adding a new and different note to this volume, which has so far had a rather excessively economic slant.**

The 13<sup>th</sup> generation was a generation of wealthy folks, who reaped the fruits of the work carried out in the past by their ancestors. Except for the above-mentioned case of Carlo, they had to deal with the crises of the old family industries. Fortunately, some of the businesses (unlike the textile industry) continued to flourish, and in certain cases developed remarkably.

As in the previous generation, there was some friction between cousins and other relatives, inevitable when things start to go badly.

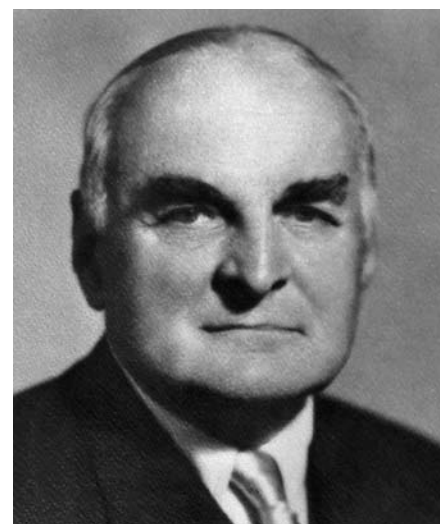
It is the generation that lived in around the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century and revolved around Milan. The Gavazzi family was numerous, and frequented the same social circles and events. In order to distinguish them better, Milanese high society classified them as followed:

- Egidio's descendants, from Desio were the Gavazzi *bej*, or the «handsome Gavazzis»;
- the wealthier members of Valmadrera and Desio were the Gavazzi *sùrj*, or the «rich Gavazzis»;
- certain families of the first group were the Gavazzi *bej e sùrj*, the «handsome and rich Gavazzis»;
- lastly, there were the Gavazzis ... of Via Ricasoli, who were the Desio descendants of Pio.

### **GIUSEPPE GAVAZZI (1883-1957)**

He was born in Milan on 16 May 1883. He married on 20 July 1907 Elena Viola, member of the Symphonic Concert company, who gave him 4 daughters and 1 son. Inside the family he was nicknamed “Giuseppon” or “Peppino”; he was enterprising, vital, appreciated for

Giuseppe Gavazzi  
(1883-1957).



Portrait of Elena Viola  
(1883-1935), wife of  
Giuseppe Gavazzi, oil  
on canvas by Giuseppe  
Palanti.

### Gavazzi-Viola Wedding

And so you too, dear Peppino  
Among the blooms showed yourself able  
To choose a VIOLET, the crowning  
Ornament of the garden.

Now what can an artless bard add  
That has not ere been said far better?  
Youth and looks, brains and goodness,  
All is yours for shared happiness.

What you lack will come  
As the priest intoned this morn  
Multiply and raise... a new generation.

You need only glance at mother and dad  
And grandpa and grandmother, the best  
Examples of my augury to you.

*Giuseppe Barbiano di Belgiojoso*  
July 22, 1907

### Nozze Gavazzi-Viola

*Donca anca ti, car el me car Peppin,  
Nella proeusa di fior te set sta bon  
De scernit ona VIOLA che, a rason,  
L'è l'ornament del pusee bell giardin.*

*E adess, cossa te voeut che mi meschin  
Disa che non v'hamm ditt in tutt i ton?  
Sii bei, sii giuin, sii intelligent e bon,  
Per vess felici gavii tutt infin.*

*Cioè, quel che ve manca el vegnarà  
Vè l'ha ditt anca el Prett in stamattina  
Moltiplicamini... in di' generazion.*

*Ma per quest non gavii che de guardà  
Mamma e Papà, el Nonno e la Nonnina  
Dell'auguri inn la mej dimostrazion.*

*Giuseppe Barbiano di Belgiojoso*  
22 luglio 1907



The fire brigade of  
Valmadrera with its  
captain Peppino Gavazzi

his youthful spirit. He remained widower in 1935, and got married again soon with Jenny Faleschini.

He appeared to be domiciled in Via Spiga 24 and in Via S. Andrea 18 with the first wife. Then he lived in Sant'Erasmo square with his second wife, who didn't give him any son.

Engineer, as his father Piero, he was the manager of Valmadrera property and of Gavazzi's ribbon industry in Calolziocorte.

He committed to his daughter Rachele the management of the agricultural industry and the administration of the estates property in Valmadrera, comprehensive of the villa with the park and all the houses linked to the villa, laying in town or in the surrounding country area.

Following to the economic crisis, which hit silk industry in 30s', he saved from bankruptcy the Gavazzi's ribbon industry, which is still the only textile industry owned by the Gavazzi family surviving to time changes.

He died for a cancer in hospital in Lecco, after being lovely treated in Valmadrera house by his daughter Rachele, remained single, surrounded by the love of a family which had been widened with a lot of gransons, some of them already married. He was proud of his descendents.

### *The Valmadrera Fire Brigade*

In 1911 he became Chief of the Valmadrera Fire Brigade<sup>1</sup>. He transferred the Fire Station to a building he owned in Via Stoppani, and in 1920, due to lack of space, arranged a further move to Via Volta.

In 1902, with the rank of lieutenant, after the Valmadrera Fire Brigade earned itself one of the remarkable successes that were the confirmation of its ability, in the Milan Competition, the Mayor awarded Giuseppe a diploma with a silver medal and a souvenir badge.

Giuseppe junior, as Assistant Fire Chief, expressed everyone's gratitude with the following words: «I am sure I speak on behalf of the whole population of Valmadrera in expressing my sincerest regret for the absence of our dear and unforgettable Chief, Mr. Luigi Ciceri, and extend my most sincere wishes for a speedy and complete recovery from the illness that has afflicted him and prevented him from sharing with us the immense satisfaction of this day.»

On Sunday, June 3, 1906, word spread that the firemen of Valmadrera had received special distinction in the Milan fire-fighting competition, placing first on the list of the competition's judges.

They were awarded a gold medal for the highest grade by the Fire Brigade Federation and another by the Ministry of War, as well as a cash award of 100 lira.

«The Mayor, Piero Gavazzi, along with members of the town council and the parish went triumphantly to meet the firemen, and everyone praised the present Fire Chief, Giuseppe Gavazzi junior, for his ability in leading his team to such a prestigious goal. Giuseppe, greatly moved, thanked everyone.»

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 9, Giuseppe Gavazzi (1831-1913).

### *The Valmadrera Band*

Giuseppe was also in charge of the Valmadrera Band which, however, was obliged to break up in 1911. "Valmadrera – Minutes of October 29, 1911: The shareholders' meeting held on October 29, 1911 moved to dissolve the Valmadrera Band and, in accordance with art. 10 of the charter, to arrange for the sale of the musical instruments, the uniforms and the activity of the band and for such purpose delegates the members of the last meeting, Mr. Bonacina Alessandro, Mr. Citterio Serafino, Mr. Bay Luigi and Mr. Giuseppe Gavazzi to compile an accurate inventory of the activity and negotiate the sale of all the effects.»

### **ANGELA DUBINI GAVAZZI (1882-1968)**

Angela was born on April 8, 1882. On February 1, 1902, during a magnificent snowfall, she married Angelo Dubini (b. in 1876, d. in Galliano in 1943).

From the diary of Franco Gavazzi, June 24, 1965: "This morning I went to visit my dear cousin Angela Dubini, with whom I always enjoy reminiscing about the history of our immense family» (Franco was Angela's cousin thrice removed on the Gavazzi side of the family, and twice removed on the Dubini side). Angela died on February 23, 1968.

### **CARLA DUBINI GAVAZZI (1883-1978)**

Carla was born on November 3, 1883. At the age of 18, in September 1902, in Valmadrera, she married engineer Antonio Dubini (19.5.1877 - 2.10.1931), the cousin of Angelo Dubini, who was married to her sister Angela.

For the occasion a great banquet was held in the large house for 36 guests. Carla was a "true beauty» and retained her looks for many years, despite giving birth to ten children and suffering several bouts of enteritis, which were treated by Dr. Bellinzona, the famous "Isn't it so!», who had discovered the renowned "Lactoserve», as Carla's sister, Adele Gavazzi, was to write years later in her memoirs.

Her sister Adele would often recall "Carla's arrival under the berçeau of Valmadrera with a large sewing basket full of sailor outfits of all sizes, which every year she passed down from the eldest to the youngest, taking in, letting out, a never-ending job. Carla also decided to order new outfits, of the same type, from Selfridge's in London.»

#### **The wedding of Mister Angelo Dubini with Miss Angela Gavazzi**

Though dream it seems, it is pure truth!  
Only yesterday this little girl was off  
to school with loose hair and short skirt  
and today she takes a husband?

No dolls with wooden heads for her  
soon they will be here in the flesh  
crying and demanding a thousand cares,  
leaving you little gifts to look after.

And what a twist of fate for her parents,  
Vittoria and Lodovico almost grandparents,  
Aunt Angela and Peppin, so young at heart  
In a flash become great-grandparents.

Slowly, slowly, I hear a voice say  
Take your time, my beloved bard,  
See the children play while their mother  
watches and knits industriously.

You're right, what better treasure  
Could we admire than this angelic couple  
And I do not exaggerate, my friends,  
For true angels these two are, I swear.

'Tis not hard to see, with her lovely face,  
how a young man such as he was led to woo,  
heart set on winning her love,  
until her favor she did bestow on him.

But let me cut short the list of virtues  
lest their number make me tedious.  
Instead help our joy to fill this room  
And shout as one "All hail the bride and groom".

*Giuseppe Barbiano di Belgiojoso  
Milan, February 1, 1902*

#### **Nozze del Signor Angelo Dubini colla Signorina Angela Gavazzi**

*Me par in sogn e l'è realtàà perfetta!  
L'è minga ier che se vedea sta iosa  
Cont giò la trezza e curta la socchetta  
Andà alla schoera, e incheu, l'è giamò sposa?*

*Alter che bambol cont el coo de legn  
Prest prest ghe sarà qui de carna ed oss  
Col so bravo ohè ohè e cont i impegn,  
Di bali e di regai che fan adoss,*

*E peu che tir bibon per i soo gent,  
Vittoria e Lodovico squasi nonni,  
Zia Angela e Peppin che in un moment  
Fior de giovinotti mi e tra li bisnonni.*

*Pian pian cont sti bei rob,... che de sto pass  
Me par de senti a di, el me car poetta,  
Tè vedet i so fiu giugà a ciapass  
E la mamma guardai fasend calzetta.*

*Gavi reson, coss'em de andà a cercà  
Puse bei de sti spòs ch'in dun Angeritt  
E me paar propri no de esagerà  
Che almen de nom, inn Anger sti ciappitt.*

*Del rest cont un faccin compagn de lee,  
Se capiss che un giovinott compagn de lu,  
L'abbia propri voru couregh adree,  
Fina a borlà nel numero dei più.*

*Ma basta che i virtù de numerà  
Hinn talment tanti che saria noios.  
Piuttost vuttem tutt'insemma a vosà  
Cont quant gavii de fiaa «Evviva i spòs».*

*Giuseppe Barbiano di Belgiojoso  
Milano, 1 febbraio 1902*



Top: Carla Gavazzi and her husband Antonio Dubini.

Above: Emanuele Gavazzi and his wife Adele Sangregorio with their daughter Serena.

### EMANUELE GAVAZZI (1885-1950)

Emanuele, or Lele, as he was known, was born on June 22, 1885. He was put in charge of the family textile industry, the Pietro Gavazzi company, of which he owned a 50 percent share (the other 50 percent belonged to his brother Pio). He was Chairman of the company, which his son Alessandro later helped him run.

In his youth he enjoyed going to Montevarchi and Figline, in Tuscany, to purchase the silk cocoons suited to certain types of spinning, performed mainly in the Rassina factory.

During the 1915-18 war Emanuele served in the motorised unit.

In 1933 he was a member of the Executive Council and the Managing Committee of the Provincial Union of Milan and Varese (formerly the Lombardy Industrial Federation). He was also a delegate in the general meeting.

In 1934 he was President of the Silk Sector Industrial Union. In 1935 he is recorded as still in the Managing Committee of the Union, and again in 1939, appointed by the Government. He was a member of the ACI (Italian Automobile Association).

He married Adele (Lina) San Gregorio (25.6.1887-31.1.1974), and lived at n. 39 Via Broletto, Milan, and, in the 1920s, on the second floor of n. 35 Via Moscovia.

He died on June 21, 1950, the day before his sixty-fifth birthday.

The children of Pio Gavazzi: Lodovico (1913-1996), Elena (b. 1914) and Guglielmo, known as Mino (b. 1922).



### PIO GAVAZZI (1888-1970)

Pio was born in Milan on April 4, 1888. After completing his classical studies, he was a reserve lieutenant in the military. During the 1915-18 war he served as Captain of Artillery.

He married Virginia (Ginia) Beltrami (1.4.1892 - 29.7.1916), who died in childbirth at 24. His parents, Lodovico Gavazzi and Vittoria Stabilini, took their two small children, Lodovico and Elena, into their home.

He later re-married twice – first in Varenna to Luisa (Nina) Lazzaroni (3.8.1897 - 3.1.1946), and later, when he was quite old, to Anna Locatelli (16.5.1907 - 20.12.1993), from whom he had no children.

Nina, his second wife, died following an operation. She left two stepchildren (Lodovico and Elena, the children of Pio's first marriage) and her own son Mino. The funeral was held in Valmadrera.

Again from Franco's diary: «Pio has broken away completely from his brother and sisters ... He gives the impression of being a cultured and sensitive man, and speaks well, with elegance of form .»

#### *Pio's homes*

Pio I (as he was called in the family to distinguish him from the other three) owned several houses (at least three) in Via Settembrini in Milan.

He lived at n. 12 Via Solferino, where he kept his wonderful art collection. He specialised in ancient Chinese objects, and also owned some very fine paintings, including a Corot and an exquisite Marco Ricci, as well as two or three early pieces.

In 1967 he resided at n. 5 Via Lovanio, Milan, and had his office at n. 33 Via Moscova.

He purchased a splendid villa in Corneliano, 18 km from Piacenza, which his second wife, Nina Lazzaroni, was very fond of. The house had been built in around 1780 by Count Ignazio Rocca, on the site of a 17<sup>th</sup> Century building, which had belonged to a local feudatory family named Pusterla.



◀◀ The villa is reached along a straight and shady avenue of poplar trees, which Count Antonio Rocca had planted in 1816-1817.

The building, of an inverted U-shaped plan, stretches out on both sides with the two factory wings enclosing a neat garden, visible from the road through the sombre, early 19th Century gates, which also frame the central section of the house with its porticoes. This part appears particularly elegant and graceful due to the harmonious distribution of its parts and the absence of any encumbering decorative features. The only element that interrupts the continuity of the porticoes is the central motif with the twin columns and crowning arch bearing the Rocca coat-of-arms.

The entrance to the building is located in the left wing, which also contains the 18th Century oratory, dedicated to Saint John. The living quarters occupy the two floors of the central part, which are connected by a magnificent staircase of three flights, located in the entrance hall.

On the ground floor are the rooms for receiving guests, while on the first floor the bedrooms open onto a sunny passageway that runs along the length of the portico. To the right of the staircase on the ground floor there is a suite of rooms, composed of two living rooms, a hallway and the billiard room – all of which are decorated throughout with frescoes. The Neoclassical decorations are particularly interesting, both for their composition and their subtle colours. Here the Piacenza-born painter and architect Gian Battista Ercole reveals a perspective and «quadratura» background, «which directs him towards a general and synthetic decoration of the rooms, avoiding the Raphaelite characteristics and the dividing up of the wall into cameo-mounted sections, a practice very much in vogue at the time».

The illusionistic elements are accompanied by elements of clear archaeological reference, such as the large monochrome figures in the dining room and the bas-reliefs created with quick brush-strokes, which stand out clearly against the dark backgrounds of the paintings in the parlour.

Nina Lazzaroni  
(1877-1946) and her  
husband Pio Gavazzi  
(1888-1970).

The rooms on the first floor of the Corneliano house are decorated not with paintings but with delicate stuccoes in Louis XVI style; in the passageway the stylised Greek elements are softened by attenuated colours and polychromatic garlands of flowers that create a refined intertwining effect on the walls and ceilings of the rooms.

The layout of the garden as it is today is just as it was when the villa was built; the green polygon is divided into sections planted with grass and cone-shaped boxwoods, enhanced by a splendid Deodar Cedar. To the right of the complex layout is the entrance to the rustic courtyard, which leads to another garden, behind the villa, which was already indicated on several plans from the 19th Century.

The well-preserved building is now the summer residence of its owners and the central hub of a farm<sup>2</sup>.

«It was in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century that the Rocca Counts gave special importance to their Corneliano residence. In those years, the idea of transforming the old «palazzo» into a luxurious residential villa, in the Rococo and Neoclassical

Aerial view of the Rocca Villa at Corneliano, purchased by Pio Gavazzi.



<sup>2</sup> From Anna Maria Matteucci, Carlo Emanuele Manfredi, Anna Coccioli Mastroviti, *Ville piacentine*, TEP Edizioni d'Arte, Piacenza 1991.



styles so popular in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, undoubtedly originated as an indication of the tradition and taste of the time. Count Ignazio II (1749-1816), in fact, was a prominent cultural figure in our city, a man of letters and a greatly admired Latin epigraphist.

Unfortunately, since the family archives have been lost, there are no surviving records to indicate the identity of the architect responsible for the great building crowned with a semi-circular gable bearing the coat-of-arms. On the ground floor there is a colonnade with granite columns; the first floor apartments of the main body face north and look out on the large avenue leading down to Viustino. On either side, two wings encircle the magnificent garden with trees, which is enclosed by sombre iron lance-tipped railings. The East wing contains the charming little chapel dedicated to Saint John and Saint Francis, which was already in place (as the «Oratory» of the «Pusterla family») in 1615 and was later reconstructed in 1775.

Also remarkable is the three-flight staircase that leads to a landing on the first floor, with the entrances to the main bedrooms. The ground floor and first floor are occupied by numerous rooms (dining room, billiard room, several parlours, etc.) decorated with beautiful frescoes and tempera paintings in delicate colours, well-matching and well-preserved, depicting various landscapes, false busts and mythological scenes. Several similar works can be found in city buildings and villas of the Piacenza region and are attributed to talented local artists who formed an actual «school». Fortunately, we have the name of one of these painters.

In the entrance hall, in fact, in the corner of a decoration portraying a vase, there is the signature of the talented artist responsible for at least some of these works – Gian

Two more view of the  
18<sup>th</sup> century Rocca Villa  
of Corneliano.

Battista Ercole (who was one of the first teachers of the Institute of Art, founded in 1780 by count and general Felice Gazola in Piacenza), with the date (*Janes Baptista Ercul fecit, 1789*). This date probably refers to the decoration, since the reconstruction of the building must have taken place at an earlier date. The year indicated by Molossi – 1780 – therefore seems legitimate.

The grand villa of Corneliano, with over fifty rooms, was without a doubt one of the most pleasant and elegant noble summer residences of the Piacenza area, corresponding to the social and economic status of what was considered one of the most prominent families in the district.

The enjoyable times spent there by the last Rocca owner, Count Gian Antonio, who lived there in the early 1800s, are still remembered. A brilliant horseman and musician, he was also ambassador of the city of Piacenza to the «Empress of the French» in 1813, in Paris.

Corneliano later had the honour of hosting, from May 26–28, 1816, the former Empress herself, now the Duchess of Parma and Piacenza, Marie Louise of Austria who, accompanied by her Court, headed by the Count of Neipperg, went to visit the nearby excavations in Velleia after her first holiday stay in Piacenza. The event was commemorated with a beautiful inscription in Latin on the staircase.

The same Count Gian Antonio was responsible, in the period of great famine and poverty of 1816–17, for the construction of the large road, about two kilometres long, leading from Viustino to Corneliano, an enlightened work of social welfare.

After the death of Count Gian Antonio in 1835, his widow Teresa (born Landi Pietra of the Counts of Roncarolo and Mezzanone (1779–1851), the last of this noble Piacenza family, a branch of the ancient Landis of Cerreto), lady-in-waiting of the Duchess Marie Louise, put the villa to a more austere use. She frequently invited the Jesuit fathers and their pupils, the «scholastics» of the San Pietro College Society. Of the Society of Jesus members who stayed in the villa, we should mention especially Luigi di Canossa, who later became Cardinal Bishop of Verona, and Father Antonio Bresciani, a renowned man of letters, who wrote portions of his famous novels while in Corneliano. Particularly generous and courageous was the hospitality of the Countess in 1848, when the fathers, forcibly expelled from the city, were given refuge in the villa.

Previously, during the cholera epidemic of 1836, she had offered to take the sick of the area into the villa, providing free board and treatment. In 1842 she had the first village graveyard constructed, to which in 1834 she added the vicarage of the church, whose bells she had already donated in 1828.

At the death of Countess Teresa, her only surviving niece inherited the ancestral fortune (after substantial bequests had been donated to the «Collegium placentinum»

The Rocca Villa at Corneliano: detail of the main body with porticoes.



of the Jesuits and for the establishing in Piacenza of the Bergamo-based Congregation of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart, founded by Blessed Teresa Eustochio Verzeri).

This niece was Countess Anna, daughter of Count Luigi Rocca (the brother of Count Gian Antonio) and Countess Maria Landi Pietra, the sister of the testatrix, who had married Count Giambattista Nasalli, son of Count Gaetano I, the former Governor of Piacenza, and nephew of Cardinal Ignazio (previously papal nuncio in Switzerland) and brother of Monsignor Francesco, Cathedral Canon, Almoner to the Duchess and Capitulary Vicar of the Diocese in the difficult year of 1848. The Nasalli Counts were an aristocratic family of Lombard and later Ligurian origin, who had come to the Dukedoms in the 18th Century with Count Girolamo I, who obtained the highest office in the local judiciary.


When Countess Anna died at a venerable age in 1887, the inheritance she left to her children included the estate and the villa of Corneliano, certain that these would ensure the continuation of the Rocca family traditions. These traditions, condensed for the sake of convenience, resulted in the inheritors inhabiting both the fine 18th century building in town and the villa of Corneliano. Consequently, the brothers Count Giuseppe and Count Gaetano, along with the descendants of the previously-deceased Count Pietro, were granted, with a decree dated February 10, 1889, the rightful addition of the surname Rocca to their own. Later, their descendants obtained, by royal decree *motu proprio* of His Majesty Victor Emanuel III, dated September 29, 1922, the renewal of the noble feudal predicate of Corneliano.

For several decades in the late 1800s and early 1900s, under the loving and austere supervision of their mothers and their grandmother – as Countess Laura Milesi Ferretti née Nasalli Rocca takes delight in recounting – the young Nasalli Rocca descendants from the three branches of the family stayed at the villa during the summer months, along with the nearby villa of Godi (which was later restored in 1897 by Count Francesco, whose son, Count Angelo Maria, still owns it today). The owners, who all remembered the villa with affection and nostalgia, included Count Saverio, who later became General of the Army Corps and Prefect of Milan, Count Amedeo, who was Prefect of Venice, and the children of Count Giuseppe, a talented historian of Piacenza, who died in 1909. One grandson, Count Giambattista (later Cardinal Archbishop of Bologna) often celebrated Mass in the Oratory of Corneliano during his stays in Godi.

The villa of Corneliano was inherited by the brother of Count Giuseppe, Count Gaetano (who died in 1912) and was then passed on to his eldest son Count Lo-



The Rocca Villa at Corneliano: detail of the main staircase.

dovico, who later moved to Padua with his family and sold the property in 1919. Following a series of transactions, the villa eventually came into the hands of Pio Gavazzi of Milan, who had the building restored and furnished with great care and continues to live there today, maintaining its sober elegance <sup>3</sup>.

### *The Bank of Commerce and Industry*

For many years Pio Gavazzi held the position of Chairman of the Bank of Commerce and Industry, contributing to its growth. He held a seat on the bank's Board of Directors for 40 years.

The Gavazzis had long had associations with this bank, dating back to the previous century, when the Bank of Commerce and Industry operated as a silk bank. The Co-operative Silk Trade Bank<sup>4</sup> was established in 1888 and set up its offices at the well-known address of n. 33 Via Moscova. After the Second World War (in the late 1950s) it changed its name to the Bank of Commerce and Industry, and later, in the 1980s, to the People's Bank of Commerce and Industry.

The share certificate of the original bank was decorated with silk cocoons and mulberry branches.

The exceptional growth of the silk industry and trade led the co-operative to enlarge its operative bases considerably, while on the home market the most favourable conditions were created for procuring the precious raw material.

It is interesting to note how this bank differed in origin from other banking companies; it was based, in fact, not on local or social opportunities, but on the evolution of a product sector – silk.

The origins of this company are evident not only in important relations with the present-day textile sector but also in its characteristic telegraphic abbreviation «Seribanca», which continues to be of great relevance today.

### *The Pietro Gavazzi Company*

Pio worked in the family textile industry, the Pietro Gavazzi Company, of which he was co-owner with his elder brother Emanuele. Pio was Managing Director and Emanuele was Chairman.

Their father, Lodovico, often sent Pio to the Trentino region to ensure the supplies of cocoons suitable for a certain type of spinning, which was carried out mainly in the Pergine factory, purchased at the beginning of the 1900s.

<sup>3</sup> From Emilio Nasalli Rocca di Cormeliano, *Corneliano di Piacenza. La chiesa, il castello, la villa*, Arti Grafiche Vecchioni & Guadagno, Rome, 1961.

<sup>4</sup> From *Storia di Milano*, published by Edizioni Treccani: «The Silk Trade Bank, established in 1910, was destined, through various structural transformations, to become (in 1951) the Bank of Commerce and Industry. One must remember that it was founded as a result of a decision made by the members of the Joint-stock Co-operative for the Ageing and Assaying of Silk with the aim of spinning off the financial and credit business of this latter, which had taken on unexpected dimensions. The purpose of the Silk Trade Bank was to «carry out credit operations relating to the goods deposited in the General Warehouses, to deal with interest-bearing deposits and current accounts, as well as operations regarding State and land credit bonds and any third party bank operations, against guarantee of the above-mentioned values.»

Pio later had his son Lodovico assist him in the company, with the idea of eventually having him take over. However, he then married for the third time and decided to hold on to his position. Nevertheless, in time the Pietro Gavazzi company found itself unable to keep up with the competition and had to be wound up, with heavy losses, after around 150 years of glorious activity.

### **CARLO GAVAZZI (1894-1957)**

Carlo, or «Carlone», as he was nicknamed, was born on January 25, 1894. He married Adelaide (Lina) Bernasconi (17.1.1890 - 9.7.1975).

From the diary of Franco Gavazzi, April 23, 1962: «I was told at the club (although Margherita had already hinted at it) that Riccardo Gavazzi<sup>5</sup> and Uberta Resta got married secretly – legally, of course, since they are both of age and the announcements had already been published. What's done is done. Lina Gavazzi who, as everyone knows, is rather a «crackpot» and clings to her son with an extremely jealous and almost unwholesome love, repeatedly postponed the marriage, with a thousand excuses, until finally the young couple lost their patience and decided to take the plunge. Uberta said she was going out to run some errands – she came back after a short time and told Mabel West «I am married» and showed her the wedding ring.»

Carlo was in charge of the Gavazzi Ribbon Manufacturing Company. He later founded the industry that was named after him, which quickly expanded abroad.

#### *The Carlo Gavazzi Company*<sup>6</sup>

The Carlo Gavazzi Group soon became active in the highly internationalised market of electronic instruments.

In the history of the group, three distinct stages can be identified, each clearly distinguished by profound changes in the organisational structure, the product portfolio and the geographic distribution of the business. In the first stage (from 1931 to 1964), the Carlo Gavazzi Company operated exclusively in Italy as the distributor of regulating and control instruments manufactured by the American company Honeywell.

During the second stage (1964-1986), after the divorce from Honeywell, the group began to develop in two different international directions: in California through Reactor Controls, specialising in the creation of control systems for nuclear reactors, and in Europe, in a *joint venture* with the Japanese company Tateisi Denki for the manufacture and marketing of switches, time-switches, reversers and electronic controls produced by the Japanese company under the brand name of Omron.

In the third and final stage, the cash acquired from the transfer of the *joint venture* Carlo Gavazzi Omron to the Japanese partner (1986) and from the winding-up of the nuclear controls busi-

<sup>5</sup> The only son of Carlo and Lina.

<sup>6</sup> From VV.AA., *La crescita multinazionale dei gruppi italiani di medio-grande dimensione*, CESPRI (Centre of Studies for Processes of Internationalisation), Università Bocconi, Milan.



The Gavazzi House in Via Sant'Andrea, Milan.

ness, was employed for a series of purchases which once again changed the face of the group, giving it the configuration it operates under today.

### **The «first» Carlo Gavazzi Company**

Carlo began his business on December 10, 1931, importing from the United States burners and fuel oil for heating systems fitted with Minneapolis-Honeywell thermostats and automatic regulators.

In the autumn of 1931 the economic depression was at its grimmest.

Carlo decided to abandon the traditional family textile business, doomed to an inevitable decline due to the constant drop in the use of silk ribbons in women's fashion, for the more promising ground of new technologies.

He began, as we have said, by importing American fuel oil burners, to replace the coal burners that were used in those days for heating in homes, businesses and industries.

The business flourished. The imported fuel oil burners were equipped with indoor, water and firebox thermostats manufactured by the Minneapolis-Honeywell Regulator Company.

Carlo then succeeded in obtaining exclusive rights for the Italian distribution of these automatic control systems, which were as yet unknown in Italy.

Minneapolis-Honeywell was a dynamic company and Carlo was a true entrepreneur. The combination of these two elements formed a recipe for success.

Slowly but surely, the heating systems for residential, commercial and industrial buildings began to be equipped with the control systems imported by Carlo.

The first rare air conditioning systems, built before the war in prestigious apartment buildings, were all fitted with M-H regulators.

After the war (during WW II the business of the company was limited to a few maintenance and repair jobs, guaranteed by a skeleton staff), Carlo resumed his commercial activity and entered the sector of industrial instruments and components, marketing products imported from Brown Instruments and Micro Switch, two American companies that had, in the meantime, joined the Honeywell group. The electronic potentiometers, pressure gauges, flux gauges and hypsometers manufactured by Brown were widely used in the control rooms of many of the large industrial processing plants (chemical and petrochemical plants, paper mills, steelworks, power plants) that were built in Italy during the period of reconstruction.

In 1953 the Carlo Gavazzi Company opened its first factory in Milan, and began to manufacture wiring control boards. In the following year the first large contract (44,000 working hours) was stipulated, for the realisation and installation of a control system at the Mobil Oil facility in Naples.

In these years, the company acquired a considerable amount of skill in the designing, engineering and «turn-key» installation of control boards and systems, extending its business

abroad as well, with contracts in Turkey, Egypt, the USSR, India, Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina and even the United States (North Carolina).

In Italy the Carlo Gavazzi company became a leading company in the market of control systems for air-conditioning plants and micro-switches. While it had as many as seven sales offices (in Turin, Milan, Padua, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Rome and Catania), the Carlo Gavazzi company was one of the first Italian companies to also set up its own indirect sales channel of local distributors, which proved to be a determining factor with regard to the increase in the sales of electronic and electromechanical components in the 1970s.

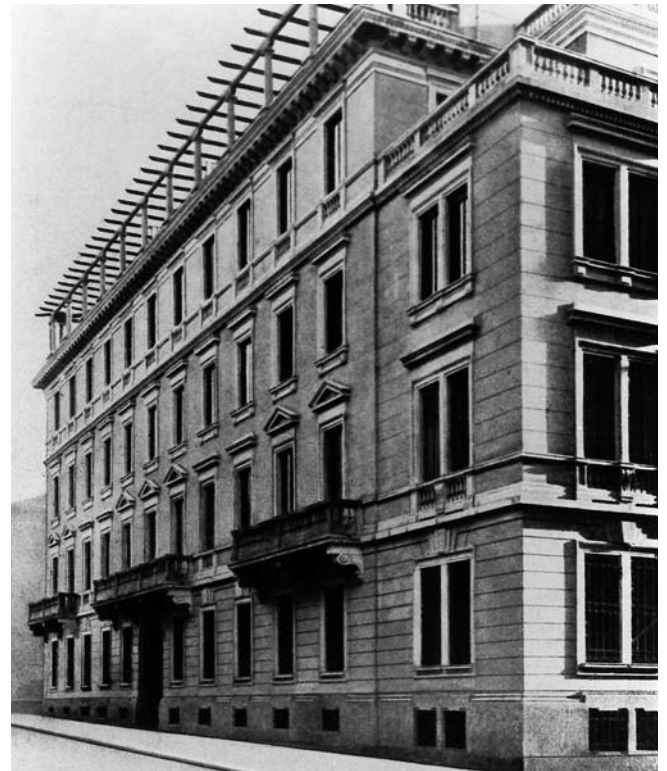
Carlo died in 1957, at the young age of 63. The business was carried on by the direct descendants – his widow, Lina Bernasconi, and his son Riccardo, who founded the company Carlo Gavazzi S.p.a.. The capital of this company was in part underwritten by a Swiss finance firm that was also controlled by the Gavazzi family, the Htte Holding AG, which later became the holding of the group, changing its name to Carlo Gavazzi Holding AG.

In the following year, the Carlo Gavazzi company entered the nuclear sector, building the control room of the experimental reactor Ispra I.

In 1959 General Electric opened an office in Rome for the management of business activities relating to the building of the nuclear power plant at Garigliano, with the construction of a boiling water reactor (BWR). The Carlo Gavazzi company was offered the construction contract, from the General Electric designs, for the bar control hydraulic system for the reactor. The two experts from the Gavazzi company who were assigned the task of evaluating this proposal realised that there was a simpler and therefore safer and more reliable way to build the system than that proposed in the General Electric designs. Those in charge of the American multinational company recognised the great intuition of these two Italian experts, and assigned the Carlo Gavazzi company the task of designing and constructing the bar control system for the Garigliano power plant.

1964 was a crucial year. In the autumn the Italian company divorced from Honeywell, after having turned down an attractive purchase offer from the American firm. The divorce was basically by mutual agreement – Honeywell wanted to take over direct control of the Italian sales network (Italy was the country in continental Europe where Honeywell products had the highest market share, evidently thanks to the Carlo Gavazzi company) while, on the other hand, the Italian company, which in those days employed around 600 workers and had by now acquired an independent capacity for design and manufacture, felt the need to expand beyond the exclusively national dimensions to which it had thus far limited itself. The Italian market represented only about 3 per cent of the international market and appeared to be too limited to allow a sufficient growth rate and an adequate return on investments in new product development. The Carlo Gavazzi company decided, therefore,

Another view of the Gavazzi House in Milan.



to concentrate its production in only three sectors (pneumatic controls for air-conditioning systems, industrial equipment and industrial components), but to operate in each sector on at least a continental level.

### **The «second» Carlo Gavazzi Company**

The new multinational scope of the group was confirmed at the end of the same year, 1964, by two important events. On October 7 the company Reactor Controls, Inc. was founded in San Francisco for the construction of the bar control for the BWR reactors of the Tarapur power station that General Electric was building in India, and in December of the same year an exclusive contract was signed with Tateisi Denki, giving the Italian company exclusive rights for the marketing throughout Continental Europe (excluding the USSR) of switches, time-switches, commutators and electronic controls manufactured by the Japanese company under the Omron brand.

The first two years of the «second» Carlo Gavazzi company were nevertheless difficult. 1965 was, in fact, characterised by heavy losses and the year after by a partial recovery; not until 1967 did the company manage to return to the *break-even* point.

A new factory was opened at Marcallo con Casone, where the Carlo Gavazzi Company manufactured panels, instruments and electronic modules for alarm, supervision and control equipment under the Sybbrik trademark. The organisational structure of the company also changed, and the various lines of business were split into three divisions. The Industrial Division manufactured instruments under the Sybbrik trademark and designed and installed regulation and control systems for industrial plants and ship propellers. The Civil Division marketed with exclusive rights the pneumatic controls for air-conditioning systems of the American Powers Regulator Company. Lastly, the Electro-mechanics Division produced Asco solenoid valves and Omron electro-mechanical and electronic components.

In 1967 a new agreement was stipulated, this time with a Swedish company named Billman Regulator AB, which consisted in a technical co-operation between the two companies, aimed at a gradual integration of their respective business activities in the sector of control systems for air-conditioning installations, with the goal of creating a leading European Group in the sector. In this context, five *joint ventures* were set up in France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands.

Understandably, the prospect of a merger between the Carlo Gavazzi and Billman companies was not well received by rival companies.

In the spring of 1970 the Swiss firm Landis & Gyr attempted a hostile takeover of Billman, through the Swedish Euroclimate AB, by purchasing its shares on the Stockholm exchange. The Carlo Gavazzi Company, an important shareholder in the Swedish company, retaliated by forming a voting syndicate to resist the bid and purchasing enough additional shares to be able to take over Billman itself. An intervention by the Swedish Minister of Industry, which nationalised part of the Billman shares controlled by the Carlo Gavazzi company, tipped the scales in favour

of Landis & Gyr, to which the Italian group finally surrendered the remaining Billman shares and the entire Civil Division, in exchange for complete control of the European branches.

Thus the battle ended, with the surrender of the Carlo Gavazzi Company in the face of government intervention.

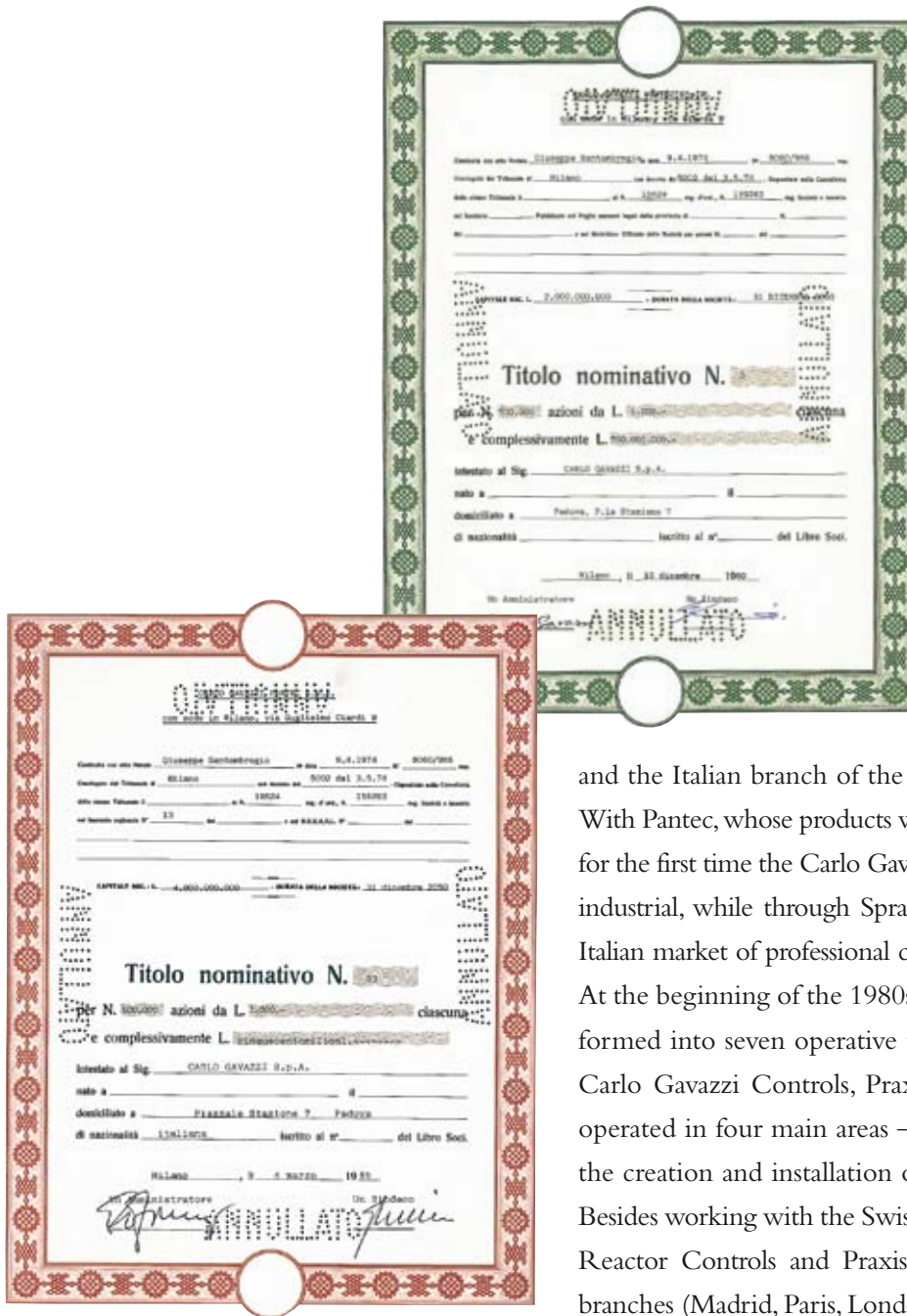
In compensation for the defeat regarding the air-conditioning system controls business, the other sections of the Carlo Gavazzi group enjoyed increasing success, especially Omron and Reactor Controls.

The Omron products were immediately very successful both on the Italian market where, in 1969, the Carlo Gavazzi Company was once again leader in the segment of micro-switches, and in other European countries as well. Omron sales reached such heights that the Tateisi Denki and Carlo Gavazzi companies decided to create a *joint-venture*. Thus was born the Amsterdam-based Carlo Gavazzi Omron BV, which held exclusive rights for the manufacture and marketing of Omron products in Europe.

In the late 1970s, Carlo Gavazzi Omron was the leading company in its market of reference in Italy, the United Kingdom and Hungary, and the second in the Netherlands and Spain; it had over one hundred direct sellers at its Amsterdam base and its branches in Madrid, Paris, Brussels, Düsseldorf, Zurich, Milan and Vienna, and independent national distributors in London, Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm, Helsinki, Lisbon and Athens.

Starting out with a small office in San Francisco and few employees, Reactor Controls moved its base to San José, California, and gradually expanded its business supplying bar control systems to BWR nuclear power plants built by General Electric. In twenty years or so, the California company supplied 70 bar control systems to as many General Electric BWR nuclear power plants, handling its own design, construction and installation. This last stage called for great technical skill, due to the very high standards for safety and precision required by a nuclear plant. A General Electric BWR reactor had typically 187 bars and therefore 374 loading and drainage pipes, which had to pass through a tin diaphragm to be connected to external equipment that controlled the flow to and from the reactor. The bars, which are not accessible for maintenance except in rare cases and with extremely complex precautions, serve to regulate the nuclear reaction, and in case of breakdown they must all be lowered simultaneously into the reactor core in a very short time (100 milliseconds) in order to bring the reaction to a halt. Through the Industrial Division the Carlo Gavazzi company supplied control systems for General Electric BWR nuclear power plants in various other countries throughout Europe, such as those in Gundremmingen in Germany, Dodewaard in the Netherlands, Nuclenor in Spain and Mühleberg in Switzerland.

In 1975 the company Carlo Gavazzi Skandinavien AB was founded in Sweden, following the signing of a contract for the installation of instrumentation systems for PWR reactors built by Westinghouse in Ringhals. During its period of greatest activity (late 1970s) the Reactor Controls company employed as many as one thousand workers, including builders, divided among the base in San José, California, the Northeast Services Division and Environmental Engineering of Syracuse, New York, and the factory in Waterford, Connecticut.



Share certificates of the Pantec S.p.A. company.

Reactor Controls gradually reduced its business over the first half of the 1980s, and closed down completely in 1986, when all the main countries had finally blocked their own civil nuclear projects (except for France and partly Japan, which did not use General Electric technology). In the course of the 1970s the Carlo Gavazzi Company also grew through the taking over of several small companies, thus opening up new segments of the market. In 1973 the group took over the Dutch company Praxis Instruments BV of Leida, which manufactured data acquisition systems for processing industries; in 1976 it bought in Italy the Chinaglia company, based in Belluno, which manufactured electric testers and multimeters and which formed the nucleus of the present-day company Carlo Gavazzi Pantec,

and the Italian branch of the American-based Sprague Electric Company.

With Pantec, whose products were largely destined for electronic and hobby craft shops, for the first time the Carlo Gavazzi Company targeted a market that was not exclusively industrial, while through Sprague it gained in a few years a prominent place on the Italian market of professional condensers and integrated circuits with special hybrids.

At the beginning of the 1980s the group was composed of around thirty companies, formed into seven operative units (Sprague Italiana, Pantec, Carlo Gavazzi Omron, Carlo Gavazzi Controls, Praxis, Reactor Controls and Carlo Gavazzi Plants) that operated in four main areas – components, instrumentation, electronic systems and the creation and installation of regulation and control systems.

Besides working with the Swiss holding and the operative units Carlo Gavazzi Omron, Reactor Controls and Praxis, the group worked abroad through the Pantec sales branches (Madrid, Paris, London, Leida, Zurich and Vienna) and the foreign operative bases of Carlo Gavazzi Plants, located in Sweden, Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia. The

first two of these were dropped in the early 1980s, while the company Carlo Gavazzi Yam Co. Ltd., a *joint-venture* between the Carlo Gavazzi (which holds 67 per cent of the shares) Company and a cousin of the King of Saudi Arabia, is still part of the group today.

### The «third» Carlo Gavazzi Company

This brings us up to 1986, the second crucial turning-point in the history of the Carlo Gavazzi Company, which, in this period, lost its two major operative units, Carlo Gavazzi Omron and Reactor Controls, almost simultaneously. The decision to leave the *joint-venture* with Tateisi

Denki was made after the chairman of the Japanese company retired and was replaced by his sons, one of whom – the one with the greater responsibility within the Japanese company – was on very bad terms with the Carlo Gavazzi Company. At the same time, the irreversible nuclear crisis, to which the accidents of Three Mile Island and Chernobyl gave the coup de grace, resulted in the gradual winding-up of Reactor Controls.

To understand the extent of the catastrophic consequences for the group, it is enough to say that 1983–84 turnover, which amounted to around 280 billion lira, was assignable for 43 per cent to Carlo Gavazzi Omron, 25 per cent to Reactor Controls (even though the business of the American company was in decline) and only 32 per cent to the remaining business activities. Nevertheless, the transfer to Tateisi Denki of half the Carlo Gavazzi Omron company and the winding-up of the American firm brought the Carlo Gavazzi Holding AG considerable liquidity, which was used to gain control of a series of companies operating in the sectors that were by now well established for the group. At the beginning of 1986, the American company Mupac (based in Brockton, Massachusetts) was taken over. The company manufactured *packaging hardware* for the electronics industry (drawers, *cabinets*, *chassis* and cupboards designed to house computer and telecommunications systems and to provide extra functions such as *real time* control, monitoring, etc.). In July 1987 the Carlo Gavazzi Space was founded, a *joint-venture* with Aeritalia for the development of electronic control systems for the aerospace sector. Between 1987 and 1988 the group was enlarged by the addition of the Danish firm Electromatic, the German Areg and the Italian companies FEME, FIT-Ferrotubi Mechanical Constructions and ACEC Italiana.

These takeovers decisions were made by the top management of the Carlo Gavazzi Company as strategic business manoeuvres, and above all, therefore, on the basis of the quality of the product portfolio of the companies purchased and their potential for growth. The geographical location of the companies, however, played a completely marginal role in the investment decision: the experience acquired by the Carlo Gavazzi group in its own business sectors, in fact, now gave it the possibility of operating without difficulties in any western country.

The most important of these new additions were FEME of Lainate, which manufactured commutators, switches, fuses and jacks (650 employees and a turnover of over 70 billion lira) and the Danish company Electromatic, of which, in February 1988, the Carlo Gavazzi Company bought out the shareholder. Electromatic was a multinational company operating in the sector of electronic controls for the automation of industrial plants (sensors, time-switches and photocells), which in 1987 had registered a net profit of 16 million Danish crowns (approximately 3 billion lira), with a turnover of 317 million crowns (approximately 61 billion lira). At the time of the takeover, Electromatic employed 630 workers and owned two factories in Jutland (Hadsten and Auning) and another in Malta, and operated a dense network of sales branches in Europe and North America.

The second foreign company to join the group in that period (1987) was Areg, a small German firm based in Gemmrigheim, near Stuttgart, which in 1986 had reached a turnover

of around 17 million German marks with its production of adjustable speed drives (electric motors) with alternating current for machinery and systems for the automation of manufacturing processes (e.g. industrial robots).

The initiatives launched between 1986 and 1988, and the subsequent operations of rationalisation and integration regarding the relative business activities, gave shape to the present-day structure of the Carlo Gavazzi group, defined in 1992 and organised into five *business units*, each with its own distinct products and geographic area.

Electromatic was undoubtedly the most important *business unit* of the group, and also the one with the most pronounced «multinational» vocation. The operating base is in Zugo, having been moved from Jutland for the sake of a more efficient co-ordination with the other group activities. Electromatic designs, develops, manufactures and sells components for the automation and control of industry processes; it has four manufacturing units in Denmark, Malta and Germany (the former Areg) and a sales network composed of 16 direct branches in Europe and North America (Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States) and over 40 independent national distributors marketing products under the brand names of Areg, Electromatic, Pantec and Soar.

The *business unit* FEME manufactures electro-mechanic components (micro-switches, commutators, jacks, railway signalling systems, etc.) at the FEME S.r.l. factory in Lainate (Lombardy) and electronic components and measuring instruments at the Carlo Gavazzi Pantec plant in Belluno. The products of the *business unit* are marketed in Italy by FEME Italiana S.p.a., while the Electromatic sales network is used for the overseas markets, which absorb over 30 per cent of production.

The Plants *business unit* is made up of the Italian companies Carlo Gavazzi Plants, Carlo Gavazzi Systems and Carlo Gavazzi Constructions, together with the Carlo Gavazzi Yam in Saudi Arabia. It specialises in the design, creation and installation of instrumentation and automation systems and in the proposal of *project management* solutions for sectors dealing in the generation, transportation and distribution of energy, the chemical and petrochemical industry and public services. This unit also provides *system integration* services, installation of automatic warehouses, production lines, *utilities* distribution networks and naval automation.

The Mupac *business unit* is identified with the company of the same name in Brockton, Massachusetts, which operates exclusively in the United States, where it is a technological and market leader in the sector of packaging systems for the electronics industry (drawers, cabinets and cupboards for *open bus* systems).

Lastly, the *business unit* Sprague Italiana operates exclusively in Italy and is made up of five companies, three of which are manufacturers, while two concentrate entirely on marketing. Sprague Italiana S.p.a. distributes BI-CMOS and BI-CDMOS semiconductors for application in the automation of the office, telecommunications, the automotive industry and industrial electronics.

Carlo Gavazzi Components S.p.a. markets sensors and other electrical, electronic and optoelectronic components for security and anti-theft systems used in buildings and vehicles.

The FIT-Ferrotubi Metal Constructions S.p.a. of Arluno designs, builds and installs telecommunications towers and metal structures for sports facilities and industrial and civil buildings. The Guanzate (Como) based Gammatom owns the most important third-party radiation plant in Italy and operates mainly as a services company carrying out sterilisation or microbic load reduction for chemical, pharmaceutical and medical industries which have to maintain high standards of quality to conform to the laws in force. Lastly, the Comtec, which also operates in Guanzate, provides services of thermal treatment for materials and non-destructive diagnostics. The financial statements relating to the accounting period ending on March 31, 1993 also included the minority interests in the Carlo Gavazzi Space S.p.a. of Milan (33.33 per cent), the Carlo Gavazzi BV of Leida (The Netherlands) (49 per cent) and the Yokogawa Instruments Corp. of Koushoku-shi (Japan) (40 per cent).

This last company (which, however, was wound up in 1993), deserves mention because it represented one of the very few direct Italian investments of an industrial nature in Japan. This was, in fact, a manufacturing *joint-venture* that had been launched in 1988 with the Japanese Yokogawa Instruments company, for producing multimeters using the Carlo Gavazzi technology. It was originally intended that the production of this *joint-venture* (which in 1992 had reached the 25 billion lira level) would be marketed by the Japanese partner on a worldwide scale. However, the initiative continued to maintain a strictly local dimension, which finally led the Carlo Gavazzi company to decide that the *joint-venture* was no longer strategic and the partnership was dissolved.

Carlo Gavazzi BV, formerly Praxis, was a company with around 40 employees, which in 1990 was the object of a *management buy-out*.

### **The financing of international expansion**

The Carlo Gavazzi company remained an individual company until the death of its founder (1957), after which his widow, Lina Bernasconi, and his son Riccardo transformed it into a joint-stock company. The capital of the Carlo Gavazzi S.p.a. was subscribed partly by the heirs and partly by a Swiss financial firm in which the family already had business interests, the Htte Holding AG, based in Zug.

Subsequently, once the other affairs of the family had been hived off, this company became the holding of the group and took on its current name of Carlo Gavazzi Holding AG.

The foreign companies of the group have always referred directly or indirectly to the Swiss holding. The financing of the group's growth was guaranteed in part through the transfer to third parties of shares in the holding company, and in part through long-term bank loans.

Since 1984, shares of the Carlo Gavazzi Holding AG have been traded on the Zurich stock exchange. The Gavazzi family controls the company, with a quota of around 48 per cent. Other shareholders include the SIP-Pirelli International Partners SA, based in Basel, which controls

Share certificate of the Carlo Gavazzi S.p.A company.



Riccardo Gavazzi  
(b. 1925).



### Organisation and management of human resources

As long as the company operated exclusively on the national level it was run by a management composed of Riccardo Gavazzi, the son of the founder, and two other Italian managers. Its expansion abroad also necessitated the internationalisation of the management team, in order to favour the development of a company culture that was well organised and fully prepared to operate in an international environment. Riccardo Gavazzi retained his position at the helm of the group until 1991, overseeing an executive committee including a Swiss manager (Werner S. Welti) and a German manager (Rainer H. Wiede).

Forced to interrupt his operational activities for health reasons, in 1991 Riccardo became chairman, while the operational responsibilities fell to the executive committee, which now, alongside Welti and Wiede, also included the general director of the holding company at the time, Luis C. Beltrami.

In 1992 a new change took place. Having regained his strength, Riccardo led what was defined as a «palace coup», forcing Beltrami (who was involved in the Italian Tangentopoli affairs) and Reiner H. Wiede to resign their posts. The operational responsibility of the group was then assigned to Werner S. Welti, *chief executive officer* of the Carlo Gavazzi Holding AG,

around 17 per cent of the Carlo Gavazzi<sup>7</sup> shares and Indelec, a holding controlled entirely by Sbs (Swiss Banking Company), with 5 per cent. A further 7 per cent of Carlo Gavazzi shares are in the hands of the group's managers and executives.

Between 1986 and 1987 the importance of its Italian business activities led the Carlo Gavazzi group to take into consideration the idea of applying for a listing on the stock exchange in Milan. At the beginning of October 1987, in fact, a financial firm was contacted and arrangements were made for the placement of the group on the Milan stock exchange; the idea was abandoned, however, after the famous Black Monday on Wall Street (October 19, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> The entrance of the SIP in the Gavazzi capital dates back to the spring of 1985, following an agreement of share exchange between the Gavazzi and Pirelli groups: SIP acquired 20 per cent of the Carlo Gavazzi Holding AG in exchange for 3.6 per cent of its own capital. A Pirelli representative (A. Rossetti) sits on the Board of Directors of the Carlo Gavazzi company while Riccardo Gavazzi in turn sits on the Board of SIP, where he represents the second largest shareholding, after Pirelli & Co. S.p.A.

who headed an *operating policy committee* composed of the five *business unit heads*, or *group executives*.

These five *group executives* were Richard P. Wood (Electromatic), Dino Masili (FEME), Salvatore Munzone (Plants), Frank Angelis (Mupac) and Alfredo Ceretti (Sprague Italiana).

With regard to human resources in the internationalisation of the group's management, the policy was to have the operating units led by local managers, who are generally better able to understand and interpret the context in which they work.

In the case of acquired companies, the existing managers were put to the test. Those who succeeded in integrating with the group were kept on and were given the opportunity to gain greater responsibility; those, on the other hand, who proved to be ideologically incompatible or insufficiently professional were replaced.

In the case of the company that represented the group's first multinational experience, Reactor Controls, the management was assigned to Franco Damonti, one of the two Italian engineers who had designed the bar control system. He moved to California with his family, where he lived for five years until a local manager employed within the company was ready to stand in. Four other Italians remained in California, however, forming a second line of management.

The companies taken over by the group were all small or medium-sized independent companies and therefore not part of larger groups.

Riccardo Gavazzi believed that to take over companies from a large group was hazardous, because if a large group discards its business activities it usually means that there is something (products, technology, markets or management) that is not working. In the case of small groups, the problems often come from other factors as well – the lack of generational turnover, the incapacity of the owner to manage the expansion/internationalisation of the business, etc.

Nevertheless, while taking into account that any change of ownership signifies the presence of a problem of some kind, Riccardo was amazed by the frequency of simple dishonesty that he found on the managerial level of the foreign companies acquired. In a significant number of cases, and especially in the case of small companies, there was a remarkable lack of professional competence, ethics and dedication.

This was the case, for example, with the German firm Areg and the American Catalina Controls, a small company taken over in 1984 and discarded in the course of 1986. In the first half of the 1980s there was a curious attempt to diversify the business activities of Reactors Controls, through the creation of water-purifying systems in Florida. After the *probi gratia* dismissal of the manager, the operating management of the company was unsuccessfully offered to as many as three different managers of the Californian company, who sensationally went against the traditional reputation of the Americans for high mobility by refusing, for personal reasons, to be transferred from San José to Florida, in spite of the attractive conditions offered to them. After attempts to persuade an Italian manager of the group to accept the offer failed, the company seized the opportunity of a favourable purchase offer from an

American firm, to which the activities in question were transferred.

A certain amount of attention was dedicated to the construction of a group «culture» through the definition of certain fundamental principles of conduct which all the employees of the Carlo Gavazzi were expected to uphold and respect, such as those concerning organisational aspects, personnel management, marketing, product development, etc.

Riccardo was a firm believer that strict adherence with accounting regulations had great value from the viewpoint of training, and as such represented one of the strong points of the company. The financial statements of the holding have for 25 years been certified unconditionally («on the first page of certification») by Coopers & Lybrand. The Carlo Gavazzi Holding AG is the only company listed on the Zurich stock exchange to use the US GAAP (*Generally Accepted Accounting Principles*), which are stricter than those required by Swiss authorities, and has been ranked fifth among all the companies whose stock is traded in Zurich for the clarity and consistency of its financial statements.

### **Economic results and development prospects**

After the losses suffered by the group during the years 1989-90 and 1990-91, certain appropriate interventions, put into effect within the companies of the group in order to lower the *break-even* point, made it possible to close the two following years with a profit, albeit modest.

In the 1992-93 financial year, the Carlo Gavazzi Group produced, with a work force of around 2,000, a consolidated turnover of 366.8 million Swiss francs, 11.1 per cent less than the 412.8 million of the previous financial year.

Calculated on similar bases<sup>8</sup>, the reduction of the consolidated turnover with respect to the financial year of 1991-92 amounted to 6.1 per cent. Despite the drop in sales, the increase in the gross operating margin from 32 per cent to 36 per cent and the reduction in fixed costs allowed the group to post an operating income of 24 million francs, 43 per cent higher than the previous year, and a net profit of 381,000 francs (+46 per cent with respect to the 261,000 Francs of the previous financial year). In actual fact, the economic result of the last year would undoubtedly have been much better if it had not had to bear the effects of the devaluation of the lira and other European currencies with respect to the Swiss franc, which caused exchange losses amounting to a total of over 10 million Swiss francs, 4 million of which were included in the consolidated profit and loss account<sup>9</sup>. The geographic distribution of the turnover in the financial statements of the Carlo Gavazzi does not show the quota relating to Italy, but rather that relating to Switzerland, where the holding has its offices. However, considering the well-defined geographic distribution of the various *business units*,

<sup>8</sup> Taking into account, that is, the de-consolidation of the participations in Carlo Gavazzi Space S.p.a., which had fallen from 66.67 per cent to 33.33 per cent, and the negative effect caused by exchange rate variations during the financial year.

<sup>9</sup> The US GAAP accounting principles adopted by the Gavazzi group predict that losses caused by variations in exchange rates are partly itemised in the assets and liabilities statement.

it may safely be said that the foreign activities constitute over 50 per cent of the turnover and involve a little less than half the group's work force.

The group's net worth appears solid. The net assets represent 31 per cent of the *total assets*, while the *cash flow*, taking into account the effects due to variations in exchange rates, has reached 22 million Swiss francs, an increase of 30 per cent over the previous financial year. Nevertheless, the rather discouraging prospects regarding the sector trends in 1994 made it unadvisable to adopt expansion strategies, but rather to continue with rationalisation and the gradual concentration of the product portfolio, thus reducing the inevitable dispersion of the activities resulting from the numerous takeovers concluded in the second half of the 1980s. The only situation that has the possibility of registering an expansion of any importance within the short-medium term is that of Mupac, an American firm which is today established as one of the most qualified manufacturers worldwide in its sector, although for the time being its market is basically limited to the United States (which does, however, represent the largest national market). At present the best method of introducing Mupac products to Europe is being determined, compatibly with the recessionary phase the group is currently going through.

**MARIA MERATI GAVAZZI (1896-1970)**

Maria, or Mimì, as she was known in the family, was born on December 5, 1896. She married notary Giulio Merati (9.6.1894 - 6.11.1980).

Before marrying she lived with her parents in the Cramer house at Via Fatebenefratelli no. 7, Milan. After her wedding she moved, along with her parents and her brother Emanuele, to an apartment on the third floor of n. 35, Via Moscova (Milan).

She died on March 27, 1970.

**PIA ULRICH-BANSA GAVAZZI (1900-1992)**

Pia was born on January 22, 1900. After her parents separated, shortly after the birth of her brother Uberto, Pia was given into the custody of her father. She therefore lived in very close contact with her grandmother, Ninetta, and her aunt, Adele Bigatti.

She grew up to be a beautiful woman. Pia married Baron Oscar Ulrich-Bansa (b. 11.3.1892, d. 5.6.1982), an artillery officer. In 1942 he was made Brigadier General and



An article dedicated to Guglielmo Ulrich (1904-1977), brother-in-law of Pia Gavazzi and inventor of the Neo-liberty style.

Pia Gavazzi (1900-1992) in a photo taken in 1920.

in 1946, after the war, he retired from the army.

Two years later (1948) he was asked to teach numismatics at the University of Padua, a post he held until 1962. He did not have a degree, but was clearly a great scholar and numismatist. He assisted Pia's uncle, Carlo Gavazzi, with his famous collection.

Oscar was the eldest of six siblings<sup>10</sup>. Oscar's father was a banker; when he retired, the Ulrich bank became the Vonwiller Bank.

From her father, Pia inherited part of his furniture and art collection, whose sale allowed the children to live a comfortable life.

She died on August 13, 1992.

### **UBERTO GAVAZZI (1902-1986)**

He was born on September 6, 1902. After graduating, Uberto worked at the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company, where he was a manager and a member of the Board of Directors.

He was in charge of the technical side of the business and the «robes» (silk dresses) department, while Simone Gavazzi, and later Pietro, took care of the administrative side and the most important department, the umbrellas.

Uberto did his military service in the Cavalry and was called up in 1940. He went to Libya, and in 1943 to Athens. Subsequently, he was taken prisoner by the Germans and sent to a German camp. In April 1944, after months of imprisonment, he was released.

With his departure for the war, not one of the three co-generational cousins employed in the ancestral company (himself, Franco and Pietro) remained.

He was a great horseman, and owned a number of racehorses that gained international renown. One of his horses was Prince Royal (son of Ribot), who won at the *Arc de Triomphe* in Paris. A few days later, however, Uberto sold him.

On June 17, 1939, in the Church of San Marco, in Milan, he married Pia Dell'Orto (b. 22.2.1915). The couple were first cousins; the four respective parents were, in turn, third cousins to each other, and Ettore Dell'Orto, Pia's father, was the son of first cousins! They had a son, Pietro, who was stricken with multiple sclerosis.

When the couple became engaged, their cousin Franco wrote in his diary: «the whole thing looks suspiciously like an arranged marriage, for the sake of re-establishing the balance of power in the Company, which has been shaky and is compromised by the share alliance of the Pigni and Dal Verme families with my own.» In 1939 Uberto had been working with Franco at the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company for 10 years. Along with his cousin Franco, he was also member of the Board of Directors of the Desio Orphanage.

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<sup>10</sup> The youngest of these was Guglielmo (b. in Milan, 23.4.1904, d. 22.1.1977), the designer who created the Neo-liberty style and whose works were in great demand as *status symbols* in prominent families. Guglielmo was an architect, city-planner, interior designer, stylist and painter.

He lived in the Gavazzi house at n. 2 Via Ricasoli, in Milan. An entry from Franco's diary, dated January 5, 1968: «Evening get-together for *bridge* at the house of cousins Uberto and Pia Gavazzi. Few homes can boast an art collection like theirs – paintings, porcelain, antique silverware, furniture, ornaments, carpets, etc., etc. – a real museum».

He was a true gentleman. He died on August 6, 1986.

### **GIULIO BALOSSI RESTELLI (B. 1902 - ?)**

He was born in Milan on June 24, 1902. Giulio was an engineer. On April 23, 1968 in the Board of Directors meeting of the Cantoni Cotton Manufacturing Company, he was elected Board member.

### **PIERA DELL'ORTO GAVAZZI (1902-1998)**

#### *The marriage with Uberto Dell'Orto*

Piera was born in Desio on October 18, 1902. In Desio on September 1, 1924, she married Uberto Dell'Orto (19.11.1885 - 28.12.1956), who dedicated himself to the family estate at Truccazzano.

Uberto was a large man, with rather rough manners but a kind heart. He spoke badly, and those who were not used to speaking with him found him difficult to understand.

He was the president of the Women's Health Clinics of Monza and Carate (owned by the Gavazzi family).

Piera loved her husband deeply, though their marriage had the appearance of having been arranged, since she was his cousin (the Dell'Ortos, by inheritance, were shareholders of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company, and at a certain time in the company's history, when partner-cousins were not always on good terms, such alliances could prove useful).

Piera was very young when she married. After the wedding, she immediately got pregnant, but she and her husband nevertheless set out on a long journey through Europe. On the way back, after covering thousands of kilometres over the rough roads and with the uncomfortable cars of those days, Piera suffered a miscarriage. Back in Truccazzano, with poor medical assistance, perhaps not properly cared for or even not looked after at all, she developed a serious infection and from then on was unable to have children.

#### *The farm at Truccazzano*

Uberto Dell'Orto bred livestock, especially dairy cows, in a leasehold farm.

He specialised in the production of fresh, unboiled milk (in those days there was no pasteurisation). The milking ritual was extremely absorbing. The cows made their way of their own accord into a tiled room, where they were thoroughly washed with soap and hosed down, after which the milkers, also washed, set to work. The milk was then sent immediately to Milan.



Piera Gavazzi  
(1902-1998) at the age  
of twenty.



Piera and Uberto Dell'Orto on their wedding day in Desio, September 1, 1924.

Once the milkers went on strike. The animals had to be distributed among the neighbouring farms so that the farmers could free them of their milk. The episode left Uberto so embittered that he rented out the property. The new tenant was able to afford to buy only a part of the livestock; the rest had to be sold off. All the milkers were then promptly dismissed.

### *The property at Civate*

In 1942 the Dell'Orto family sold their property at Civate (for the sum of 3,500,000 lira), which they had inherited from Antonio Gavazzi in 1885.

The property consisted not only of the house, which in itself was not very attractive, being rather poorly designed, tucked in the midst of the village and with no view, but also vast mountain areas, Lake Pusiano and half of Lake Oggiono.

Piera was very sorry to have to leave the house, as she had put a great deal of effort into making it comfortable.

### *The death of Piera*

Piera died in Monza, at the Zucchi Clinic, where she was a shareholder, on July 12, 1998. She left a sizeable inheritance to her thirty Gavazzi nephews and nieces, and many donations to the missionaries and the parish churches she had known and frequented.

To the Dell'Orto family she left her share of the property inherited from her husband, except for her part of Cypress Island, on Lake Pusiano, which she bequeathed to Gerolamo Gavazzi, her nephew.

### *A profile of Piera*

During the war, Piera often left Truccazzano to visit her relatives in Desio, taking along a wagon full of every kind of farm produce – butter, flour, eggs, etc.

Uberto and Piera were very generous. Childless as they were, they had the pleasant habit of giving their nephews and nieces who, little by little, became increasingly numerous (eventually more than thirty) cash gifts of 50,000 lira and later, with inflation, 100,000 lira (from 1954 onwards) for Christmas. In those days this was a considerable amount and noticeably

improved the quality of life of the young families. After the death of her husband, Piera continued to pay out this exact sum for almost 40 years.

Deeply attached as she was to her home, after Uberto died she continued to live in Truccazzano, despite the fact that she was not on very good terms with the Dell'Orto nephews and nieces.

She had a great flair for languages, spoke English fluently and had a good command of French and German.

In 1922 and 1923 she accompanied her father on an official business trip to Russia. Giuseppe, in fact, had been appointed by the Italian Government to re-establish trade relations with Russia.

She had the habit of corresponding with her brother Franco in English. The two were very close; he was always happy to invite her to stay, because she was always cheerful and «*helpful*», even in the midst of mixed groups of guests. He considered her a valuable resource when he had demanding guests to entertain.

She was fond of the piano and played every day, health permitting, for as long as she lived. She preferred the company of modest and respectful people, and frequented many priests and nuns. She was a very charitable person, and happy to see her efforts appreciated.

Every year, at her home at n. 4 Via Cernaia, in Milan (the Dell'Orto house), she used to organise a charity fair for missionaries, managing to collect large amounts of money to send to the missions. She was awarded the *Pro Pontificie et Ecclesia* gold medal, and was President emeritus of the «Ladies' Association for the Missions» for nearly forty years, from 1954 to 1993.

Like many of her relatives, Piera was also a domineering character; she was, nevertheless, also kind, unselfish and generous.

She was a woman of great depth of character and felt a genuine concern both for her fellow-members and for the missionaries, who she admired as romantic heroes spurred by faith to the frontiers of humanity. She was a woman of few words, but capable of great sacrifices. For her missionary passion she had left other worthy associations of the city in order to dedicate her time, interest and work totally to the foreign missions. Her home in Via Cernaia had become a laboratory and a meeting place. Twice a month a little group gathered together in her salon and, amidst tatting, sewing-machines and thimbles, lessons in «missionology» were taught by a veteran missionary or the director of the Association.

Before the meeting ended and the various tasks to be carried out at home were shared out, they prayed to the patron saints of the Missions, St. Francis Saverio and St. Teresina, advancing their various petitions – sick members, missionaries in difficulty, renewed interest in the Easter ceremony, etc.

Due to her sincere love for the cause and her great respect for the Director of the PIME, who co-ordinated the missions throughout the world, Piera was involved in many initiatives – the religious ceremonies, the vocational Masses, pilgrimages, the annual visit to the sick fathers of Lecco and the deceased fathers of Villa Grugana, as well as the unfailing annual meeting at Terrazza Martini. The highlight of the social year, however, was the craft exhibition in the little

church of San Celso, held by the dear Oblate fathers. This was a tiring event but, together with the Christmas Fair, it represented the main opportunity for the Association to collect funds for the purchase of cloth, fabrics, etc. and to «recruit the new generation». In addition, Piera also made a discreet appearance at the Missionary Congress of PIME in September.

Another important event were the pre-Christmas lunches, which became very popular also with the relatives of the Association members and reinforced the devotion to the missionary cause and the sincere exchange of greetings for Christmas and the New Year.

Piera's charitable leanings led her to sponsor the building of a school-hostel in the Amazon, which today is named after her and remains for future generations as a testimonial of her great faith and love for Jesus and the Missions.

She was never once heard to criticise or gossip.

## MY FATHER: FRANCO GAVAZZI (1904-1984)

### *Childhood and family life*



The Gavazzi cousins photographed in Desio in the 1920s; from left: Egidio, Rodolfo, Franco and Luigi (later Don Egidio).

He was born in Desio on July 19, 1904. Franco suffered deeply when he lost his mother at the age of 10, and was replaced by Aunt Mamà (Ernestina Belgiojoso Gavazzi).

He would recall how, while she was alive, he was never scolded or punished. With Aunt Mamà things changed drastically. He repeatedly said: «She is not Mamma and yet she tries to act like a mother.»

Here are a few representative lines from his diary: «I know only too well what it means not to have a mother, and I really believe it is the greatest misfortune that one can have.»

«26 years today since the death of my beloved mother! Time has dulled the pain, but by no means the conviction that her death has been an irreparable misfortune for my family. I am comforted by the secure knowledge that Mother is among the Saints in Heaven. She, whom I barely remember yet who lives on in her children, having imparted to them so much of herself, and Grandmother Maria (Gnecchi Sessa), whom I had the honour and the great fortune to be close to for many years, are the two people I have known who come closest to perfection.»

In 1912, at the «Suore del Cenacolo», Franco took First Communion from the hands of the then Monsignor Achille Ratti, who later became Pope Pius XI.

He often stayed for dinner, eating with his grandmother Peppina (Gavazzi Biella),

partly for the sake of helping to diminish the number of children and partly as an attempt on the part of Aunt Mamà to keep him away from the others, because he was «contrary». He did not enjoy staying with his granny, however; he wanted to be with his brothers and sisters.

My father recalls that for lunch on Fridays his grandmother used to eat just one single sardine! One day, the servant served her a sardine without the tail, and she said: «*e il cuin dova l'è?*» («and where is the tail?»).

At home (in Via Brera and in Desio), in addition to proper Italian, both English and Milanese dialect were spoken. The English teacher was Miss Ida, with whom my father continued to keep in touch by letter for the rest of her life. When she died in May 1958, he wrote: «This morning at 8.30 at San Marco a Mass was held for our Miss Ida, on the initiative of the sisters, Carlo Borromeo and myself.

Half a century ago, in an age and a world so different from today, Miss Ida was a figure of primary importance in our lives. Now she rests in a French cemetery, alongside her husband, a man named Dufour, a disabled veteran of the First World War».

Grandmother used to pray in English with the children (the eldest four down to Rodolfo). She was adamant that they should learn the language well.

My father always spoke in English with Aunt Piera and as adults, after they were married, they continued to correspond in the same language. He also had German lessons, taught by a certain Prof. Rebajoli.

Before 1914, Franco and his sister Piera were taught at home by a teacher named Miss Magnani. The teacher would sit at the middle of the table and the two children at either end. Miss Magnani had the habit of tilting her chair, and one day she happened to tip over and fall, to the great amusement of her little pupils. Piera, more moderate, asked if the poor woman had hurt herself (to which she replied «not much»), but my father laughed heartily, without the slightest regard or consideration for the teacher who, somewhat in a daze, continued to check her hair, worrying that she had messed it up. «That was really a wonderful moment», Aunt Piera said, years later.

As children, they often went to Paderno to stay with the Gneccchi family, in October. Here lived the rather eccentric Uncle Carlo Gneccchi, who would suddenly appear making awful sounds, and consequently scared the little ones.

In those days, the telephone was operated through a switchboard operator; it was not possible to dial the number directly. It was also rare to own a telephone. Often it was enough to pick up the handset, make contact with the telephone exchange and ask to be put in touch with, for example, «the Gneccchi household», without having to give a number, because the switchboard operators knew it well.

One day, the operator took a long time to answer. When he finally heard her voice, Franco, exasperated, said: «Listen here Miss, I've been ringing for ages; if you take so long to answer it means you're probably ugly as well!» He had always been disrespectful, but with my mother, who was very sweet-natured, he improved greatly.

One had to know how to handle him. Aunt Mamà sometimes asked Aunt Piera to speak to him. She herself was a little wary of talking to him, for fear he would answer rudely; through Aunt Piera she got better results.

He studied first with the Jesuits and later at the Parini High School of Milan. Father Giuseppe (in those days Don Leopoldo Riboldi) of the Dominican monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie, a man of great charm and brilliant intellect, played a decisive role in my father's life. As the latter declared, in fact, he revealed certain mental capacities in Franco of which he



Degree certificate in Political Science, obtained by Franco Gavazzi in 1932.

was as yet unaware, and inspired in him a self-confidence that was at first foreign to him and which later, in his opinion, the family environment did its best to destroy. In addition, Father Giuseppe wisely pushed him on to graduate in Political Science, when by this time he had abandoned all ambition. Franco had originally been enrolled in Economics, a subject he had no great liking for. He later changed to Political Science, in which he graduated in 1932.

### *Conflicts with Aunt Mamà, Aunt Fanny and other relatives*

My father's relationship with Aunt Mamà and his other aunts and uncles on the Gavazzi side were on the whole always difficult. The following are some extracts from his diary, written in the 1930s.

Newly-engaged couple Nolfo di Carpegna and Vittoria Chierichetti were awaited in Via Brera for the engagement party; Nolfo, however, was unexpectedly called to Rome because an aunt of his was dying. My father wrote in his diary: «I have never been that lucky».

In 1938, the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company began to have financial difficulties. At home the blame was put on Uncle Rodolfo. «The 'hens of the household' (Aunt Mamà and Fanny), he wrote, «go around blathering and moralising that endless mistakes have been made, that it is necessary to sell and liquidate at all costs and immediately, that Rodolfo has been a sensational failure, and other such nonsense.

We are in a time of genuine panic. When the reins are in the hands of a woman like Aunt Mamà - incompetent, bird-brained, all impulsiveness and no common sense - families also go to ruin. Father's health is being undermined and jeopardised by the harpies that surround him.»

Again, «We (Rodolfo and I) are at the heart of our family, the two outcasts, the two rejects. Although we are the natural descendants of our father's line, in the circle of his relatives we have been displaced by other loves, by other trust.»

In an attempt to change the hostile attitude of the family towards himself and Uncle Rodolfo, my father sought the help of a priest and friend of the family, Don Carlo. This latter set to work and went to speak with Aunt Fanny, who was considered to be «different from Ernestina, equipped with a heart and a soul». The attempt failed, however, as Fanny declared that she was in full agreement with her sister.

Franco complained about «the terribly humdrum mentality of the environment we live in» - referring to Aunt Mamà, Aunt Fanny, etc.

«If Father had had at his side an intelligent woman instead of an ignorant and presumptuous wire-puller, he would by now have been Senator for a long time.»

When, after his marriage, he visited the Majnoni family he declared: «How wonderful it is to be with people who love each other and love me! And how different my acquired family is from my original family! The death of my dear Mother truly wrecked the hearth and home, and never before have I felt so strongly that she was really a centre, a hub of inestimable value.»

And again: «How long will we have this ruinous woman always in the way? And the worst thing is that one cannot even hate her, because she is convinced that she always does what

is best, for the good of others.»

«She is a presumptuous meddler. Not content with tyrannising in other people's homes, she thinks she can extend her jurisdiction to the conscience of the relatives.»

«Father is away on business; here there are Aunt Mamà, Uncle Simone and Peppino<sup>11</sup>. The atmosphere is always a little electric (I refer to that in Via Brera: outside it is even worse), because what with the grim anti-Fascism of my relatives and the blind fanaticism of Peppino, sparks set off an explosion at any time.»

«In Via Brera they hold one of those enormous receptions that are in the style of the worst traditions of the Gavazzi household, and therefore the passion of Aunt Mamà, who, with regard to family traditions, when she does not distort them altogether, always prefers the least commendable. I very much like having people around, but I also like to enjoy their company, to have pleasant conversations, to approach my guests one at a time; for Aunt Mamà, on the other hand, the ideal reception is that in which the guests are packed like so many sardines in a tin. I like to select, to mix groups, try to bring together people of refined circles and tastes; for Aunt Mamà, however, the ideal is what is known as a minestrone [«vegetable soup»]. And so, alongside Senators Conti, Scalini and Treccani, my parents-in-law, the Pesenti couple (the former Podestà of Milan and his consort), the Marinottis, Facherises, Pecori Giraldis, Turatis, Cerrutis, Dozzios, Vittadinis, etc., there is a whole *côterie* of people who are entirely uninteresting, *dull* and tasteless. But then, if I should attempt to establish any kind of similarity of taste between Aunt Mamà and myself, I think I would never succeed; in which case, I do better to resign myself to the fact.»

«Aunt Fanny, colder and more hostile day by day, now barely even greets me! Before long she will perhaps stop greeting me altogether. Poor woman! She has a good nature in many ways, but she is very unintelligent and, as more or less everyone else in her family, she is slightly deranged. The blood of the Biella family has been no better than poison – let us hope, at least, that we have managed in our generation to have victoriously counteracted it through the healthy grafting of marriages onto the ancient Gavazzi family tree.»

«Now we no longer own our beloved house in Parravicino<sup>12</sup>. From now on, visits to Parravicino will only be made at the invitation of the tenant. I want nothing more to do with Aunt Mamà, so I will not have to hear Father repeating, word for word, the unfair, old and stale refrain of the many alleged reasons why we should be grateful to her.»

«After lunch Aunt Fanny turned up (poor woman, how she detests me!), and promptly attacked me without provocation, saying that she would be willing to take the children to Ponte di Legno for the summer as long as I promised to stop being unkind to Aunt Mamà! Perhaps she thinks that a man of 35 years old can be treated in like a child of 7 or 8, who is promised a reward if he is good and studies hard. Naturally, I replied as calmly and coolly as



Franco Gavazzi was awarded a gold medal by the Firemen's Convention of 1935.

<sup>11</sup> Giuseppe Marioni, husband of Giuseppina Gavazzi.

<sup>12</sup> It was, in fact, rented out to a third party.

I could that I cannot accept conditions regarding a matter that is not her business, and that I consider myself the only judge of what I say and do»<sup>13</sup>.

«Today is the thirtieth anniversary of the death of my beloved Mamma. It is thirty years, therefore, that this strange (for want of another word) family arrangement has been operating and raging in our home – an arrangement that has been the cause of so much trouble, so many tears, so many woes. Old as he is now, Father has not yet rediscovered a family, even though he perhaps does not realise it. He persists blindly in living with outsiders and distancing himself more and more from those who are and who should be his natural descendants, who should be the ones that represent his environment, his pleasure, his everything. May the Lord's Will be done!»

Desio, October 9, 1948: «Donna Paola Calvi has died, at the ripe old age of 85, naming as her principal heir Eugenio Radice (which was to be expected) and leaving also, among numerous other bequests, an annual income of 15,000 lira, beginning from 1949, to Eugenio Belgiojoso, her first cousin on her mother's side. I am right in saying that Aunt Mamà has the best luck in the Universe – we have heard her complaining endlessly about being obliged to help her surviving brother-in-law, and now the kindness of an old cousin comes along to relieve her of even this small inconvenience.»

### *Relations with the family*

From my father's diary, 1943: «Yesterday evening I played a little *bridge*, at the very modest quota of 1/2 «centesimo» a point, with a group of officers from the Corps of Engineers. One of them was from Como and one from Carate Brianza, and with them, naturally, I was unable to conceal my identity. It is my fate that, wherever I go, I always find someone who recognises me as a member of the famous and powerful family. All the more reason why I should make an effort to be worthy of it.»

Upon returning to work in 1943 after his discharge: «I must try to find my own way through this maze of complications created by the war in the business world. I flung myself into the work with great energy, and I just hope that Uncle Simone, who has never had a very opinion of me, does not dampen my enthusiasm when he returns. I spend part of my day in the factory, where I have the impression that my reappearance has been received with sincere goodwill, and the rest of the day in the office; in a few days I also plan to *tackle* the Bank of Desio, of which I am a Board member.»

December 1946: «The Christmas period and a time of prayers for Granny Peppina. This will be an act of dutiful homage – almost of atonement, in fact – in memory of a person who, although she was in every way far much better than me, I never appreciated or loved while she was alive.»

1946: «Uncle Simone is still on the Riviera, but I would never call him a collaborator (in the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company), neither valuable nor *otherwise*, as ever since my earli-

<sup>13</sup> Later, however, the house was lent anyway.

est childhood we have never seen eye to eye and our relations have always been marked by mutual distrust.»

«Lunch in Via Brera, with Piera and Uberto, Ernesto and Vittoria and, as always, Aunt Bice Alfieri (Biella).

Poor woman! It is rare to come across such a flat and insignificant personality. Yet, from what I am told, the Biella family must all have been like this. Even Granny Peppina, whose family praised and still praises her to the heavens, boasting of her exceptional intelligence and rare qualities as a teacher and a scholar, was in actual fact just a good woman, undoubtedly very proper in her sentiments and her conduct, but nothing more. If she has left some traces in her children, they are certainly not traces that especially do her credit. For me, the family member who truly stands out is Grandfather Egidio – he was a real gentleman, open-minded and liberal (in the true sense of the word). He would certainly have spurred his children on much further if he had not been weak (as is more or less the case with all Gavazzis) in the face of the extremely limited and yet tyrannical personality of his wife, who was a typical «bourgeois», as one said in her day, despite the fact that all four of her grandparents were of pure aristocratic stock. Yet the small Lombard aristocracy, which was unable to survive, to become acclimated, to transform and modernise itself, must have been more middle-class in soul and manner than much of the middle class itself. This is a fact that has become clear to me over the years, in the heart of my family, in which it is undisputable, as I have said, that the personality of my grandfather (who was, in actual fact, the grandson of Eugene de Beauharnais, the natural father of Great-Grandmother Ernestina Gavazzi Pascal) was by far the superior of the two.»

«Of my father's four sisters, Aunt Pea, the only full-blooded Gavazzi, is the only one who is normal; Aunt Fanny is a bit odd but saintly, and the other two are nothing short of dangerous.»

«... Rodolfo and I always talk about the same things, and our family situations and the relationships, not good but unfortunately irreparable, that bind us (or divide us, which is perhaps more accurate) to our father or, rather, to that complex «matriarchal» system in which our father is no more than a pawn to be manoeuvred. It is strange, and at the same time comforting, to see that although we have taken separate paths, Rodolfo and I have come to the same conclusions and the same point of view.»

«This evening I am on fatigue duty – I am going to Desio for dinner. How deep and indelible is the mark left by Granny Peppina! She, poor woman, who spent her lifetime trying to educate herself, without ever learning anything more than worthless little things, she who was unable to carry on a really intelligent or educated conversation, even though at first sight she may have appeared even brilliant, in a natural attempt to avoid placing herself in an inferior light sought only the company of the most slovenly and mediocre people. All her friends put together were not worth a penny. Well, she has passed on her character to her children, and Aunt Mamà, in this as in many other things, is following her example to the letter. She, who is a classic presumptuous nullity, and knows she can only stand out among people of inferior standing or bird-brained kooks, has done nothing for the past 24 year but bring us

into constant, daily contact with all sorts of oddballs in our own home. And so I find myself, for the umpteenth time, having to have lunch with the Albonico and Paleari couples.»

And again in 1962: «Stand-up dinner at Piera's house with sisters, in-laws and first cousins (Rodolfo and Pia are not in Milan). Let's hope that at least we'll eat well – these exclusive family reunions, which have been imposed on me every now and again almost since my birth, have always been tiresome for me.

So let's hope the food is good!»

April 11, 1939: «I have received a letter from our former Miss Ida, and I am really very glad. She lives in France now and is the wife of a disabled veteran. After all these years she has remained very attached to us, and she writes that she guards jealously in her heart all her memories of our childhood and our dear, unforgettable Mamma. Those were peaceful years, those were times in which our young lives were surrounded by people who were kind and loving, and at the same time intelligent and understanding. When Mamma, the only irreplaceable person in my life, died, there was still Granny Maria, who maintained the same spirit, but whom the hateful environment of our house intentionally kept away from us. Now Granny is dead, too, with her has gone my whole connection with a happier past.»

### *Relations with his father*

My father respected my grandfather, but did not love him and criticised him in many respects. Here are some excerpts from his diary.

«Rodolfo is also taking the blame for the enormous loss of the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company; in my opinion, however, the greatest responsibility is Father's, because, while he certainly has some technical talents, he is by no means an industrialist.»

At the beginning of 1939 my father wrote, in reference to a letter he had sent to my grandfather: «The purpose is to show him that – *rebus sic stantibus* – things cannot continue in this way. The increased cost of living, the family grown and growing, the insecure future, in the sense that mine is a dead-end endeavour and that my only prospect for getting on is... the death of my elders – these are the points I have expounded – convincingly, I trust – in three packed, handwritten pages, and I believe that something will come of it. Father has some very strange traits – in some cases he is extremely incomprehensible. Rodolfo is right – it is easier to be his son-in-law than his son. For Filippo, and especially for Peppino, he has found various work possibilities, while Rodolfo and I are forced to work as «sons of the family» until we are 40 or 50 year old... perhaps until we become grandfathers!»

«... As soon as Father (who never stays up late) went home, the conversation immediately took on a more lively, unrestrained tone, and we quite enjoyed ourselves.»

On April 1, 1941, my father received a note from Uncle Luigino Lado informing him that he had been nominated Board member of the Stresa joint-stock company (a division of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company): «I am pleased about it, because it shows that my family has finally realised that I also exist in this world.»

### *Business initiatives*

On September 19, 1944, my father set up a limited partnership with Giovanni (Gino) Maccali for the mass production of men's suits. The business was based in Cinisello and had eight machines.

After some time, having taken on a number of orders for military institutions, business began to pick up and profits were fairly good.

In 1945 this first little company was closed down and liquidated and a new company was set up, the G. Maccali & Co. in Monza, with around sixty machines. A third of the capital came from my father, another third from Uncle Rodolfo and the remaining third from Maccali. Including Rodolfo in the company ensured a good supply of fabric from the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company.

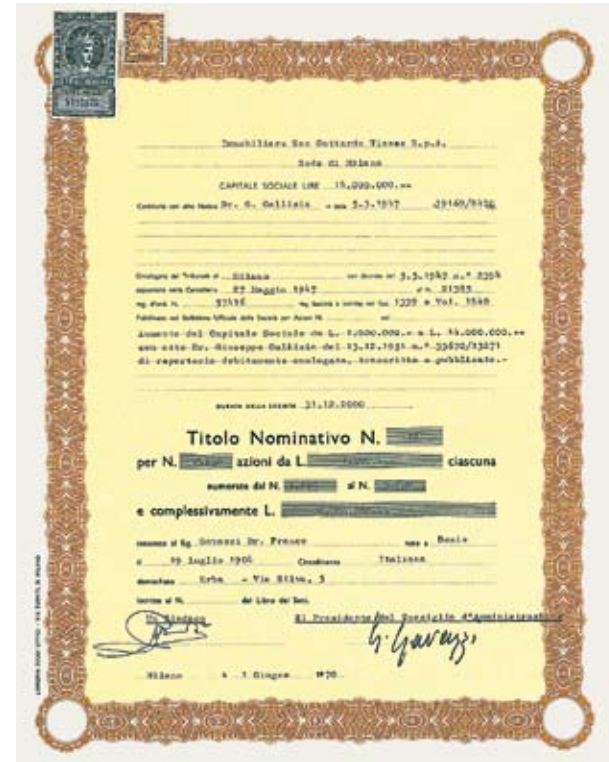
«My new tailoring workshop is in full swing (managed by the excellent Maccali along with his sister and two brothers). We now have 16 workers with a trained cutting 'expert', and 12 working at home.»

In 1946 the company opened a shop at Via Farini no. 27, Milan, making it the outlet for their entire production.

From my father's diary, March 3, 1947: «A brand new initiative of mine – the setting up of a new real estate company (with entirely my own capital) for the purchase and restoration of a building in Via Freccie Azzurre (outside Porta Ticinese), where the business of the Maccali company will have to be concentrated – workshop, storage room, offices, the apartment of the family and the shop. I naturally had to liquidate part of my share capital to invest it in this new property; and I hope I have made the right decision. In the meantime, the combination in question allows me to supplement my modest income quite substantially.» So it was that the San Gottardo Ticinese Real Estate Company was set up. The business was consequently transferred to n. 19 Via Zamenhof, Milan.

Subsequently, however, the company ran into some difficulty as a result of the suspension of the military orders and the death of Gino Maccali, in 1947, who had been the true mover behind its success.

On November 26, 1947, the following article appeared in the newspaper *L'Unità*: «At the Maccali Clothing Manufacturers – Disbandment attempt foiled – Business run by women workers – Arriving at work last Saturday eighty women workers of the Maccali Clothing Manufacturers in Via Zamenhof were locked out of the factory, while at the same time a van full of clothing and other materials was leaving the premises. This was a clear attempt on the part of the owner to disband the business; the sector Union and the workers made every effort to oppose the move, keeping watch on the factory day and night to make sure no materials were taken away. Since Monday an Emergency Committee, set up by the workers, has taken charge of running the factory, ensuring that work proceeds as usual. Production is continuing satisfactorily and the attempt of the employer has for now been effectively thwarted while the actual manufacturing potential of the company is being assessed.»



Share certificate of the San Gottardo Ticinese Real Estate Company.

Again from Franco's diary, February 3, 1948: «In the afternoon the notorious factory committee of the «Maccali» slipped unexpectedly into the office at n. 48 Corso Magenta and forced me into a discussion lasting over an hour. It is very difficult to get into their heads that, in all this unpleasant affair, the one who has lost the most – or, in other words, the main creditor – is myself, and that therefore, as such, I am the one most deserving of pity.»

In the end, after a series of ups and downs in which Uncle Rodolfo was also involved, the Company did not manage to pull out of its great financial crisis.

The Gavazzi brothers were creditors, as were their suppliers, the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company.

In 1948 the company was declared bankrupt. My father and Uncle Rodolfo were by now saddled with enormous debts in a company of which they themselves were not in charge (my father was also on the Board of Directors, along with Premoli, a lawyer who represented the Rossi company, his cousin Pietro Gavazzi, Mr. Bonino, who was a creditor for the supply of goods, and Prof. Mauro, a reliable associate of the Gavazzis)<sup>14</sup>.

With the help of the above-mentioned Prof. Mauro they finally succeeded in liquidating the business, which had by that time become a source of great anxiety. So it was that my father and Rodolfo were forced to sustain considerable losses.

### *Egidio & Pio Gavazzi*

My father Franco was a manager and Board member of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company, where he was in charge of advertising, public relations and trade relations, a responsibility which obliged him to frequently undertake long and uncomfortable journeys to visit customers.

He was appointed Head Office Director on October 5, 1944, with joint signatory rights with Uberto Gavazzi; in 1953 he became a member of the Executive Committee along with Pietro – who was nominated Managing Director – and Uberto Gavazzi.

He was the representative of Egidio & Pio Gavazzi within the Assolombarda, in the textile union, until the 1960s. He was also President of the ENAL Gavazzi or CRAL (formerly the «After-work Centre» during the Fascist regime), as well as the company Bowls Club. In the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company he remained on the Board of Directors until January 1968<sup>15</sup>. On March 31, 1956, at the age of 51, he resigned as manager of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi and retired from business: «Today is my last day working for the Company, in the sense that I will continue, without any fixed hours, as an advertising consultant, and as a member of the executive committee if I am re-elected at the next meeting. I shall not any longer, however, be in the direct day-to-day employment of the Company. Perhaps it is better this way, even though initially the move cost me a great deal.»

He kept this decision secret even from my mother until he actually carried it through. When

<sup>14</sup> The Gavazzis also had their trusted associates on the Board of Auditors, including an accountant named Antonio Brusadelli.

<sup>15</sup> See, in this chapter, Pietro Gavazzi (1913-1983).

she complained that she had not been told beforehand, he replied: «I did not tell you because you would have started reasoning and I then wouldn't have been able to do it any more!»

He did, however, continue to work with the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company, performing special tasks and keeping his desk.

On behalf of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi, in 1958 he donated the famous Franco Tosi steam engine to the museum of Science and Technology of Milan, the one which had been installed in the Desio factory. From his diary, October 22, 1958: «My idea of donating our old steam engine, the «Queen Margaret», which up until the First World War used to power all the looms of the Desio factory, to the Museum of Science and Technology has been launched successfully. This is a worthy solution to what seemed to be an insurmountable problem of space. In so doing, we will have use of the area and the cubic volume vacated by the old, glorious and time-honoured but cumbersome machine, and we will have secured for the admiration of the public an important relic that was considered a miracle of national technology 68 years ago. It is agreed that, in its new location in the Museum, the engine will keep the name it was given at its unveiling in the presence of the Gracious Sovereign of the time and King Humbert I.»

In the 1960s Franco still represented the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company in the Assolombarda, the textile manufacturers' association.

He remained on the Board of Directors of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company until the beginning of 1968. From the diary, January 30, 1968: «I have resigned from the Board of Directors of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company, where, sadly, catastrophic developments appear inevitable. This is a very painful decision, but necessary, even though from now on I will not be able to keep a close eye on the large capital I have tied up in the company.»

### *The Zucchi Clinics*

In the early 1950s my father was Chairman of the Zucchi Clinics, but he subsequently had to resign the position when his sisters, who had placed their trust in him, criticised him for having sold shares in the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company regardless of a union agreement.

Franco, in fact, had announced to Rodolfo his intention to sell the shares and buy the house in Milan, but, when Rodolfo did not make a move to organise the sale, he decided to go ahead anyway, to the discontent of the family<sup>16</sup>.

He then worked towards his re-election as Chairman, taking the place of his deceased brother-in-law, Uberto Dell'Orto.

On March 22, 1957, one year after his resignation from the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company, he wrote in his diary: «On Friday 22, at 11 o'clock in the morning, at n.5 Via Illica, in Peppino Marioni's office, the Board of the Nursing Homes of Monza held a meeting and

<sup>16</sup> This was the account my mother gave in 1998, which does not, however, agree with the information I was able to gather regarding the matter and which is recorded above in the paragraph «Incomes and Wealth».

I was elected Board member and President, in replacement of dear Uberto. I desired this enormously. Now I shall finally have a permanent job, which will keep me occupied on an almost regular basis.»

In 1966, during his tenure as chairman, the Carate villa was purchased from the Belgiojoso family, complete with its approximately 22,000 m<sup>2</sup> of park, for the sum of 240,000,000 lira<sup>17</sup>. Previously the clinic had been rented.

In the 1960s an intense political movement backed by a number of parties advocated the nationalisation of private clinics. These in turn asserted their rights, establishing and reinforcing their associations, in which my father worked hard, with dedication and responsibility<sup>18</sup>.

### *Cultural and military activities*

My father was involved with the Pro Cultura society in Desio, where he organised conferences, engaged speakers, etc. My grandfather was President and my father Vice President.

The Pro Cultura Gavazzi had no relation to another similar, but «political party-oriented» initiative – the Fascist Cultural Institute. The Catholic Pro Cultura was instead a family-based, community-oriented institute, for whose support donations flooded in from all parts.

In 1938 my father began to lose enthusiasm for the «dear old» Pro Cultura, as well as for the new Fascist Cultural Institute.

He was an officer in the «pre-military» aeronautic courses, which he followed enthusiastically and with a sense of duty. He taught theory to the young students, then led the pre-military troops of the pre-aeronautic departments. This task kept him busy several evenings a week and every Saturday afternoon.

His experience as an officer of the Home Guard began in 1933. In 1938 he was made a Commander of the Pre-airmen, with 900 recruits and only 6 officers under him. Milan, in fact, had been divided into four sectors corresponding to four pre-military battalions, one of which was commanded by himself.

He worked enthusiastically and with dedication in the context of the Young Fascists' Group, since it operated on the margins of Aeronautics, his greatest passion. He was careful, however, not to volunteer for other causes; in fact, he regarded his superiors as «louts», and declared that his was a forced Directorate of «Sansculottes».

### *Other appointments and activities*

My father was involved in several of the family businesses.

<sup>17</sup> One of the consultants of the Clinics was a certain Guido Gavazzi (no relation). When he died, in July 1967, my father wrote: «This morning I rushed to Desio to pay my respects to the dear departed Guido Gavazzi, who has finally been relieved from his suffering, at the age of 84 (the news was given to me by telephone yesterday at Villa d'Este, right in the middle of a game of *bridge* with Marta Berlingieri, Franco Viganotti and Giovannino Quartieri). Guido Gavazzi came from a family that had been employed by my own for over a century. His father, in fact, was my grandparents' estate administrator in Desio; he himself performed the same service for my father and us brothers, as well as of my mother-in-law, Aunt Anna Rossi, etc. Among the obituary notices in the *Corriere* were those of the Bank of Desio and the Nursing Homes, for both of which he had been an auditor.»

<sup>18</sup> See paragraph «Other appointments and activities» .

In 1940 he was appointed secretary to the Board of Directors of the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company, in the place of Costanzo Mapelli.

He was Chairman, then board member and later, from March 1957 onwards, again Chairman of the Clinics of Monza and Carate (named first Health Clinics, then Nursing Homes, and finally the Zucchi Clinics), board member of the Bank of Desio, board member of SAPEL, the Verona Leather and Wool Joint-Stock Company (of the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Group), secretary (until 1956) of the Board of Directors of Targetti Wool Manufacturers, Board member of the Lanario Sardo Group and Board member and manager of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company. He was also a board member of the Stresa Joint-Stock Company (owned by the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company).

In 1947 he was appointed President of the Desio parish band (made up of musicians and choir-singers), and in 1948 he became Vice President of the Hunting Association; he was a Board member of the Pius XI Boys' Orphanage and President of the Stanga Nursery School of Casiglio, which was donated by Ettore Conti and Engineer Masini, who had given the land needed to build the school.

In 1947 he was a Board member of the Milan Aero Club and in the 1950s was First Honorary Councillor of the Gliding School.

In the 1950s he was also part of the board of examiners at the University School of Weaving, in Piazza Leonardo Da Vinci, Milan.

He was for many years a member of the District Tax Board (from 1945 until the early 1970s).

He was a member of the Board of Directors of the «Cà di Fioeu», which met at the Archbishop's palazzo.

In May 1959 he was nominated vestryman of Fopponino, and member of the Church Committee of the Parish Church of San Giovanni Battista and San Carlo in Fopponino.

In the 1960s he was President of the «San Vincenzo», a position he held for over ten years.

In the same years he was part, by appointment of the Prefecture, of the Juvenile Protection Centre, which met together at the Magistrate's Court of Desio.

In the late 1950s he became a Board member of the ANCIP (National Association of Private Nursing Homes), which in 1966 was taken over by the AIOP (Italian Association of Private Hospitals), one of the three representatives of the 99 private nursing homes in Lombardy.

He was also President of the Association of Lombard Private Clinics.

### *Incomes and wealth*

In 1941 my father wrote with satisfaction in his diary that he now had an income of over 225,000 lira; by 1942 this amount had risen to 350,000 lira: «I have never been so rich!» The family budget exceeded 220,000 lira per year (300,000 lira in 1943).

In 1947, on the occasion of the temporary progressive tax on wealth, the general shares file of the Ministry of Finance declared that Franco Gavazzi, living at Villa Gavazzi, n. 4 Via San Pietro, Desio, and at n. 21/A Via Solferino, Milan, was the owner of shares in the

following companies: the Ambrosiano Bank of Milan, the Insurance Company of Milan, «Cieli» Ligurian Electricity Enterprises Company of Genoa, the Electricity Distributions S.A. of Savona, Edison of Milan, the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company of Milan, the Selt Valdarno Electric Company of Florence, National Hydrocarbons of Florence, the Valdarno Mining Company of Florence, the Bessandro Real Estate Agency of Milan, the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company of Milan and the «New Finance» of Milan.

My father's taxable wealth amounted to 44,800,000 lira, with a total tax load of almost 6,000,000 plus collecting commissions, accessory charges, etc.

In December 1956 my father put his parcel of shares in the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company up for sale and offered it to Rodolfo. His plan was to use the exchange value for the purchase of a garage, which he did in fact buy in equal partnership with Aunt Piera (Gadefa S.r.l. Garage at n. 3Via Poggi, Milan), after having sold to Rodolfo, in February 1957, his shares at 4,147 lira each. Subsequently, in June-July 1957, Rodolfo had to resign from his position as Managing Director of the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company, and later also sold his parcel of shares.

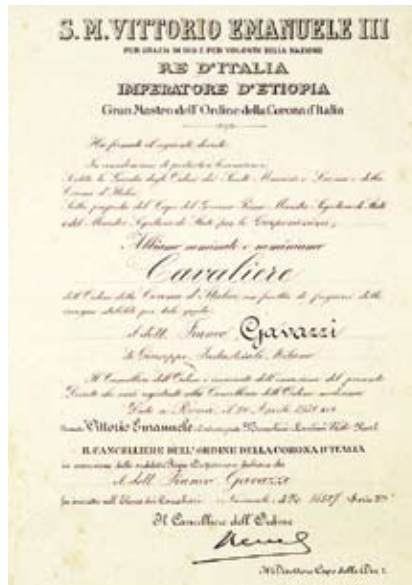
*Titles and honours*

On September 22, 1935 my father was awarded a diploma and a gold medal by the Fire Brigade Convention of Desio.

The nomination as Knight of the Order of the Crown of Italy in 1938 and the certificates of merit awarded to Franco Gavazzi by the Town Council of Milan: the "Ambrogino" and the "Golden Ambrogino".

On April 20, 1938 he was nominated Knight of the Order of the Crown of Italy.

Subsequently he was granted the title of Commendatore, which, as a loyal monarchist, he declined, as he also did the title of Cavaliere. From his diary, on February 16, 1953: «I have received a letter from Campilli, Minister of Trade and Industry, informing me of my nomination as «cavaliere» for services rendered in favour of the Republic. Needless to say, I am sending a courteous but firm reply turning down the honorary distinction, «considering my



sentiments of unfailing loyalty towards our Royal Dynasty in temporary exile». The nomination came to me through the Assolombarda.»

As a member of the District Tax Board, on December 7, 1950 he received a silver medal of merit from the Milan City Council, and some years later, on December 7, 1957, the gold medal, known as the «Ambrogino». The motives were the following: «In over ten years of belonging to the District Board of Direct and Indirect Taxes he has worked with a great sense of responsibility and commendable zeal in the best interest of the city.»

### *Military service*

My father belonged to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Engineering Corps. His first post, at the age of 20, was at the Engineering Corps barracks in Via della Scala, Florence (1925).

His first summer camp was in Pineta di Bibbiena, in the Casentino region, at the foot of the Sacro Monte della Verna.

In the winter of 1925-26 he attended the cadets' course of the Engineering Corps in Pavia. Here he met Luigi Pirandello, Senator of the Kingdom. In 1926, as a sergeant, he spent a few months in Santa Maria Capua Vetere. In May 1933 he was Lieutenant of the Royal Air Force. He was called up again in July-August 1934 for training at Grosio di Valtellina and at Santa Caterina Valfurva.

### *Experience as a pilot*

«If the blue sky echoes with the familiar rumble of an aeroplane engine, a sound I always find exciting, my yearning increases and I feel like a bird in a cage, a slave in chains or something of the sort. Aviation is truly the great passion of my life, and fine weather never fails to fuel it. I only hope that, at least for a few more year to come, age and family do not cause it to be relegated among other unrealisable passions!»

My father first flew in 1931 at Taliedo, on an Aviatik<sup>19</sup>. He obtained a 2<sup>nd</sup> degree civilian pilot's license (no. 0338) on December 9, 1931.

Again at Taliedo, he later flew on the Ro 5b, the Caproni CA 100, the Breda BA 15, the Breda BA 25, BA 15s and others.

He took part in races and competitions. At the Aviators' rally and the II Speed Plane Circuit in Parma on May 27, 1934, he took first place and won the Starace Cup with Pino Moneta as passenger in the I-FEBO. In Turin, competing against well-known names in Aeronautics, he came in fourth.

<sup>19</sup> This plane, with its rotating engine, was a former Austro-Hungarian spotter plane, then became war booty, and later was used in flying schools.



Franco Gavazzi, Lieutenant of the Royal Air Force, in uniform.

Franco Gavazzi and Margherita Majnoni d'Intignano at the Rally of Verona (Boscomantico Airfield, July 27, 1935). The aeroplane is an IMAM Ro.5.

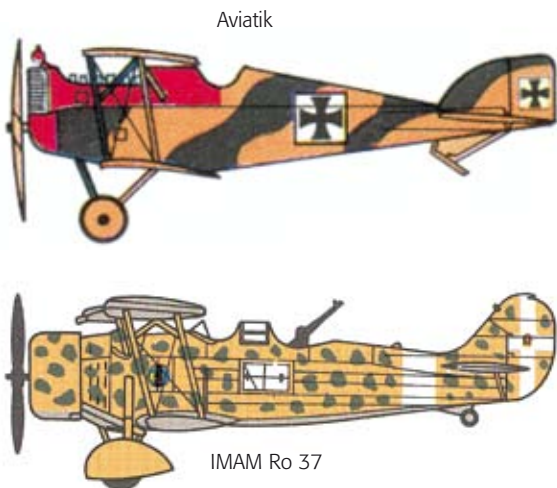




Franco Gavazzi, right, with cousin Egidio Gavazzi (1907-1987) at Taliedo in 1931.

#### Franco Gavazzi's airplane ratings:

- Aviatik
- Breda: BA 15, BA 15S, BA 25, BA 28, BR 2, BR 3
- IMAM: Ro 5bis, Ro 37bis
- Caproni: CA 100, CA 100 IDRO, CA 164, CA 310, CA 311, CA 313, CA 314



He also had an accident, of which little is actually known, as he never talked about it. It seems that while he was taking off he hit another plane that was landing. My father was unhurt, but the other pilot died instantly. He managed to avoid a probable conviction thanks to an amnesty granted on the occasion of the birth of one of the King's daughters. Perhaps, however, this version that was rather maliciously circulated in the family among us children was fancifully exaggerated. In his pilot's documents, in fact, in the part reserved for «flying accidents», he himself declares: «January 16, 1932 – h. 15.10 – at the moment of takeoff with aircraft I-FIDO RO 5bis, I hit an ASI military plane – in the crash the «Romeo» I was flying was wrecked.» On April 1, 1937 he was accepted in the Air Force at Cameri, «that wonderful airfield» where he was first taught military flying, the greatest aspiration of his life. As a military cadet pilot he began on April 6, in the Breda BA 25. At this time he had the rank of lieutenant. He then continued with the BA 28, and later with the BR2 and the BR3. All these were training planes.

On June 2, 1937, therefore, he became Military Pilot BR3<sup>20</sup> of the Royal Air Force, classed as reserve pilot officer.

It is amusing to read the «personal report» written by his superiors in relation to the period he spent at the School of Piloting: «Lieutenant Gavazzi Franco, called for the purpose of obtaining his military license, served in this School from 1/4/937 to 1/6/937/XV. Physically in good health, but not very strong. Loves sports in general, but does not practice them. Can swim. Intelligent and cultured. Has a good memory. Expresses himself correctly. Has a serious nature, a little reserved. Respectful towards his superiors; good companion. Has a fair grasp of military culture. Is very enthusiastic about flying, in which he shows ability. In only two months he has obtained his military license (having completed a total of forty hours of flying) after performing every test satisfactorily. He is reliable. He wears his uniform with pride. A good Reserve Pilot Officer with 2 (two) points. A good pilot with 15/20 (fifteen twentieths) points. Cameri – June 22, 1937, year XV.»

He was extremely skilful in aerial acrobatics with the Breda 28. His superiors initially tried hard to persuade him to become a fighter pilot with the CR 20, but my father preferred reconnaissance. He was therefore transferred to reconnaissance at Bresso (33<sup>rd</sup> squadron of the 19th observation formation). Here, on June 15, 1937, he officially qualified as pilot of the RO 37b, his first «warplane».

He was always happy when he went to Turin and passed the military medical exam that allowed him to remain in the Air Force as an active reserve pilot and part of his beloved «Flying List», continuing the squadron practice flights (in the BA 15 and BA 15s) of 10 flying hours a year.

At the end of the practice he was awarded a sum of money, «a modest but welcome reward for our noble efforts».

<sup>20</sup> B.U. 1937, regulation no. 31, p. 7471.

In August 1937 he made regular flights to Como in the Caproni CA 100 Idro seaplane.

In 1938 and 1939 he trained at the RUNA (The National Royal Union of Aeronautics) of the «E. Pensuti» Royal Airport of Taliedo in the Caproni CA 100.

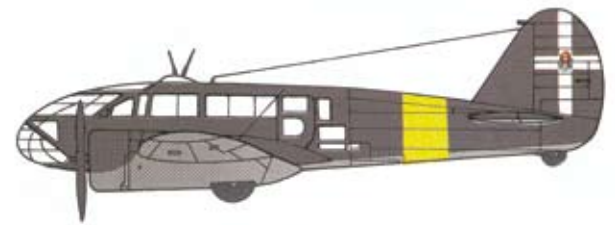
In July 1939 he bought, in equal partnership with Tonino Brivio Sforza, a CA 100 (Caproncino). Uncle Felice had generously made a loan of the 10,000 lira needed, against security, which was more or less theoretical and payable over a very long period of time. Tonino had invited my father to the «Clubino» and proposed the business, and they agreed to purchase the I-ERMO, with Fiat A50 engine, together.

However, the sanctions imposed by the League of Nations back in 1936 had already resulted in a dire scarcity of petrol, and what there was cost quite a bit. In 1939, after the purchase of the CA 100, the Government adopted measures banning the use of transports and petrol in order to save the balance of trade and reduce fuel imports to a minimum. From that year on, therefore, they were not allowed to use their cars and also, obviously, the aeroplane.

On June 10, 1940, with the onset of war, my father was called up and assigned temporarily to ground duties («what a *diminutio capitis* for a pilot!»), as the cadres of the flight crews were for the time being complete and my father was already 36 years old.

So he was sent to the 151<sup>st</sup> deposit, in Baggio, as a driving instructor, with the job of teaching the cadets (around 170) of the Royal Air Force to drive.

Later he was assigned first to Bresso and then to Maldegem in Belgium (near Brussels) as head of the vehicle department for three months (September-December 1940), and then to Capua (August 1941). He remained a «called-up pilot of the Flying List with airport duties».



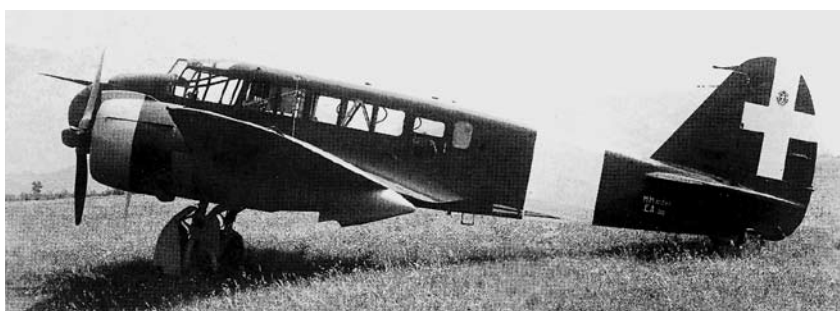
Caproni CA 100 Idro and Caproni CA 311.



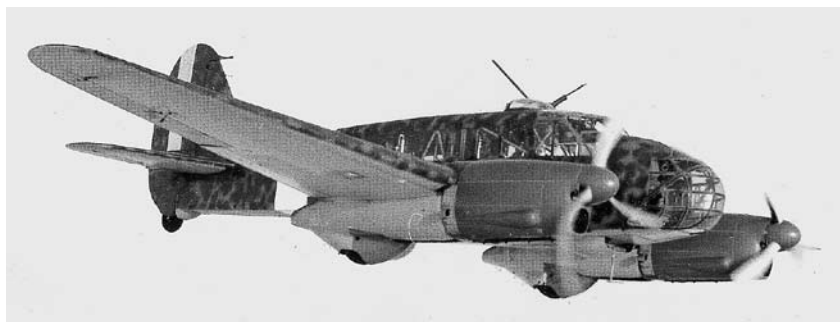
Franco Gavazzi at an aeroplane rally in 1934.

A squadron of Caproni CA 310 planes.

The military pilot's license obtained by Franco Gavazzi on July 31, 1937.



Caproni CA 310, Belgium model.



Caproni CA 313.

On April 1, 1941 he was promoted to the rank of Captain. On August 21, 1942 he was re-admitted into the flying service. He was transferred to Tassignano, near Lucca, where he had to take up flying again (August 24), after a pause of almost two years, in the RO 37 bis and then the twin-engined CA 310 and CA 311. These were the first «war flights» registered in his log-books.

Subsequently, in January 1943, he was assigned, passing from the 33<sup>rd</sup> Squadron O.A. to the 119th and 120th, to the reconnaissance planes at Sussak, in Istria, where he continued to fly the CA 164 with its 180 horse-power Alfa 115 engine, and then the CA 313 at Pola (Altire di Pola) and CA 314. He was the adjutant general of the formation.

In April 1943, he was transferred to the 68th group in Monfalcone (Begliano). In the same month he was assigned to the command of a section of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Squadron of Ronchi, stationed at Ghedi, greatly satisfied at having been placed in command of a flying unit – «an honour usually reserved only

for career officers». Later, however, he had to give up the task, as there was only one plane in working order.

Finally, on July 1943, he was transferred directly to Ghedi at the head of a flying unit of the 120th Squadron with three CA 310 planes. He left from Monfalcone in the 310 loaded with all his personal effects (including his beloved bicycle), his co-pilot and the flight engineer. Due to bad weather and insufficient fuel he was forced to land in Verona; he arrived in Brescia at 8 o'clock on the following morning.

He was discharged in August 1943 on occasion of my birth, I being his fourth child (so regulations stipulated), and he went back to working at the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company. His last «war flight» was, in actual fact, at Ghedi, on August 4, 1943.

My birth, therefore, was his good fortune, as it freed him from having to make the difficult and tragic choices that were to follow the events of September 8, 1943 – events that occurred just a short while after his final discharge from the armed forces.

In 1947 he took up flying again, this time as a civilian, on a Piper at Linate, after the long interlude since the summer of 1943.

From his diary: «This is a great day, marking my return to the skies after the tragic summer of '43. A ride with Forcella in the «Piper», a high-winged monoplane of English make, very slow... a «beach umbrella» type. I felt as if I had stopped flying just the day before. «*Sur Sum corda!*» I realise with joy that I am not yet so old as to be pensioned off!»

On October 5, 1947 at Linate my father took me for a ride in the Piper. I was four years old, but I clearly remember that simple circle over the field. It was a wonderful and exciting experience. It was then that my father infused in me his love for flying. The 10-minute flight is recorded in his log-book, along with the comment: «with Lolo [my nickname at the time], the first of my children to fly with me». The following year he also took Egidio, my elder brother, for a ride. After September 1948, however, he let his pilot's license expire.

### *Political ideas*

My father was a firm monarchist, and initially looked on Fascism favourably. Although he was a staunch anti-Semite, however, he could not accept the alliance that Italy had made with Hitler, whom he regarded as a vulgar and barbarous murderer (especially after the invasion of Austria). His diary from the 1930s shows an incredible capacity to predict political events on an international level. In fact, all the way back in 1937–38 he understood that Europe would not be able to avoid becoming involved in a war, with the alliances later proven accurate. Being a religious man, he himself was drawn by the fact that Fascism, in contrast with Communism, gave particular importance to religion.

The following are some of the thoughts my father wrote down in his diary: «The most uncivilised populations are, in fact, the most democratic; democracy is synonymous with regression and barbarism.»

«Beautiful music, like all other forms of real art, never ages! This is because beauty is an absolute concept, and not at all relative; exactly like the truth. There is no such thing as old ideas and new ideas, but only good ideas and bad ideas; both types may last no more than a few days.»

«It is good to feel different from the masses! It is the feeling of belonging to an aristocracy in the classic sense of the word, to the better class, and I am proud of it!»



Caproni CA 311.



Caproni CA 314 B.

Franco and Margherita Gavazzi with their eldest son Egidio (b. 1937) and Stefano (b. 1939).





«Two close friends»,  
as my father used to  
refer to these planes in  
his reminiscences.

«June 4: national Statute day – poor Statute! It continues to stay at the apex of Italian juridical trappings as the fundamental law of the State, and yet how distant is its spirit! It is like an empty carcass without a soul, which just barely manages to hold itself up with artificial props.»

«The real satisfactions in life one must look for and learn to find in the heart of one's own family. This is what I know and feel, though still vaguely, in the constant ferment of irrepressible and untamed passions, desires and aspirations. Yet these, by the grace of the Lord, I hope to one day allay completely and irrevocably.»

«The beginning of the so-called 20th year of the Fascist Era. History will pass its judgement – a judgement from which we contemporaries, necessarily influenced by passions and prejudices, are as yet precluded. What we can say is that the Fascist revolution was born and came into the limelight of history with an aura of good intentions and admirable policies, but that, along the way, many of these failed miserably.

Was this the fault of the main actors? Or the responsibility of individuals? Or should we rather recognise that events are stronger than men, who are almost never able to dominate them? These are questions that we gladly leave to our descendants, content to think that, as far as we are concerned and in some way things will work out, we have done our best to serve our beautiful Italy and His Royal Highness the King.»

«My soul is a mixture of Romanticism, and, alongside the deeply-rooted and rational conviction that makes of the Monarchic institution my first and greatest allegiance, there is room also in my heart for a somewhat naïf sentimentalism made of an unconditional love for and unconquerable attachment to all that is noble and truly great in this base world.»

March 2, 1939: «Today, at 6.07 pm, after a very short conclave, Cardinal Camerlengo Eugenio Pacelli was elected Pope with the name of Pius XII. I am sure that the ill-famed German Government will be far from pleased at the news, and that here also it will be a bitter pill to swallow for some. That blockhead Farinacci, for example, who, in one of his recent articles on *Regime Fascista*, dared to direct his braying against the newly-elected, then Secretary of State, to criticise his policies and views, and to predict – if I remember rightly – that he would never become Pope, because... he was an unpleasant person! The honourable fraud would pay anything right now to not have circulated such nonsense in his vulgar newspaper. This is really our fate – that Fascism should be made up of a head of great intelligence and a plethora of blockheads, without anything in between. The hierarchical order, here in Italy, is purely formal, and not intellectual, as it should be. It is an unhappy destiny, and without doubt a serious threat that hangs over the whole system, if not, in the long run, the cause of its downfall.»

March 23, 1939: «The twentieth anniversary of the foundation of Fascist Combat groups. Much ground has been covered, many goals reached, great glory won – yet deep inside something says: God help us! The solemn inauguration of the XXX Legislature was held in Rome, before the Chamber of the Fascist Groups and the Corporations, with an address from the Throne. I listened to the address on the radio in the afternoon – it was very firm, very dignified and truly regal, and contained quite a clear hint at the reason for some of our demands regarding France.»

1943, Desio: «And if we shall be actually condemned to come to the same end as the Russian Imperial Family, would it not be better to stay all together and face death in the form of insurrection or Bolshevik action, surrounded by our loved ones? For now, however, I do think we can relax – a total subversion does not happen unexpectedly, but is preceded by a preparatory stage whose symptoms are usually fairly recognisable. In any case, I believe that we should have the time to take our extreme measures: and yet, as I have said, it seems to me that for now not even the first signs have appeared. Besides, I personally refuse to believe that Communism could really take root in Italy – there may be and probably will be isolated attempts, but I do not believe the character of our people is suited to the setting up of such a system. And also, after 20 years of dictatorship, whoever could sincerely hope for a heightening of the oppression that Communism would bring? Our traditional Latin common sense should rather encourage us to look towards a return to the old ways, that is, to a regime of liberty. Just today, in the factory, five workers came to ask if I could arrange a talk, so they might hear my opinion on the committees that have been constituted inside the factory – a gesture both gratifying and reassuring, which shows that there is still an understanding between employers and workers. And besides, how many times have I heard it said, in the few days I have been here, that all the workers are happy to have me back and hope to see me there every day! I also went to visit the company canteen, and I was greeted by such a thunderous applause from the 150 workers that were there that I felt moved and embarrassed. I did not know where to look.»

1943: «In Desio, as in other places, there have been a few riots, some looting, a few beatings. The crowds, however, were stirred up against those they believed to be guilty of injustice and greed, rather than for merely political reasons – this included those egregious bloodsuckers Pissavini, Vitalini and Scalfi. Someone also proposed making a raid on our house, but this suggestion was promptly rejected. Our family is still enjoys general respect and admiration, besides which everyone knows how we have always seen the situation. I myself purposely mixed with the most numerous groups in the crowds and crossed the whole procession of workers as they left the factory, in order to sound out their mood and see up close how they feel about me. I was, as always, greeted warmly and amicably by the people.»

1944: «Some days ago I received a visit from my orderly Carlo, and he told me that he was about to leave for the mountains of Varese to join the patriots. He fears he may be given away by one of the many Fascist spies and press-ganged – a practice which, he says, is causing numerous groups of veterans and new draftees to leave secretly from all the surrounding villages. It seems that real secret organisations are being formed for enlisting the patriots, escorting them to their meeting-places and co-ordinating their activities, as well as subsidizing the young conscripts who, in refusing to join up, find themselves without an income. We ourselves have received invitations from various sources to join this noble initiative. I am now gathering information, with the greatest caution and secrecy, through the intelligent Giuseppina Bosio, to learn how and in what measure we might help the patriots, and I have already promised the full support of myself, Rodolfo, Pietro and Egidio.

These groups represent the last traces of our national independence and of the true Homeland. If the population does not help them with financial and natural support they will have no alternative but to scatter or surrender unconditionally to the new and old tyrants, and so we will find ourselves alone and defenceless against the brutality of the foreign invaders and Fascist oppressors. All the more so since this cursed republic has already begun to get its clutches on the situation – it dictates laws and ordinances, orders all kinds of retaliations against dissidents, continues to draft the young, creates unwholesome demagoguery in an attempt to catch fools on the hook of unsustainable social reform proposals, creates a new flag (!!!), slanders and persecutes the innocent and harmless, etc. This is the new and the old system of preaching violence and arrogance and, since an honest man could never spontaneously support such a state of affairs, the Fascist Republicans continue to fill out their still meagre ranks with elements drawn from the basest and most dangerous mobs. Here, as in other towns, a watch has been instituted among the people to guard the German telephone wires, seeing that everywhere there are acts of sabotage against these lines. Naturally, I am also included in this, though I do not yet know when it will be my turn to stand guard. The rest of the news from here is that Count Longoni and former town clerk Tiadina have at last been set free.

The latest rumours were that the Germans demanded around 1,000,000 lira for the release of the unfortunate Count. Incidentally, it is said that these barbarians were barely aware of such systems before occupying Italy, but that later, through contact with the dreadful corruption that has spread, fomented and propagated throughout our country in 20 years of dictatorship, they promptly and eagerly set themselves to learn, and today have happily exceeded their teachers!

Over the past few days I have lunched at the club a few times, where I had the pleasure of seeing a number of people with whom I had almost lost touch. Our old club is now more popular than ever, and we agreed that, with the few big shots that hang around there (the Pirellis, Donegani, Giulio Sessa, my father, Ettore Conti, Franco Ratti, the Prinettis, Motta, Peppino De Capitani, etc.), the club would be the perfect place for the Germans to make a profitable haul. There would be ransoms amounting to many tens of millions.»

1954: «Domodossola is completely draped with flags for the 10th anniversary of the so-called liberation, with swarms of partisans – men and women – and other suspicious types, in the following of the hierarchies and pecking orders of this new democracy by which we are afflicted, humiliated, dishonoured and tyrannised. Among these, I am told, there is also that dubious individual who answers to the name of Raffaele Cadorna.»

### *A profile of my father*

My father Franco had a great love for nature. On April 25, 1938 he wrote: «This evening I finally heard the first nightingale, here in the garden in Monza<sup>21</sup>. It seemed to be «trying out its voice» for the wonderful concert it will have to perform during its nights of amorous serenading in May and June».

<sup>21</sup> At the house of Aunt Anna Rossi; the house later passed to the Tacoli family.

He often recorded in his diary events of this type, such as the birth of tadpoles in a pond near the house, the flight of swans over a lake, etc. «This morning Marco discovered a small grass-snake in the vegetable garden. He immediately told me of his important discovery, and I rushed to the place to make an investigation of a technical nature. It was indeed a harmless grass-snake. I took it carefully in my hands, to the great enthusiasm of the children, and put it on the living room carpet so they could watch how it gracefully slithers along; and after it performed for a while I let it go in the bushes around the pond. I hope my children will never be like the fools who, out of sheer ignorance, are repulsed by certain animals and especially reptiles, while in fact they are considered some of the best friends of the farmer.»

After the aeroplane, my father's favourite vehicle was the bicycle. He also loved hiking in the countryside and the mountains.

«If I were an animal» he used to say, «I would like to be a goose, because it is at home in three different elements – earth, water and air.»

He was a cultured man, a brilliant conversationalist, intelligent and gifted with a sharp sense of humour; he also loved music and played the piano well. In 1942 he decided to take up playing again. «I had a great natural flair and it was already a great passion of mine, my cult, the little triumph of my younger years.»

He went frequently to La Scala, where he had two seats for the season (it always vexed him not to have the box that the Gavazzis had kept for over a century).

He was very fond of history, literature and art, and wrote sonnets. He loved historical literature, «from which one always learns something. Life is too short to read nonsense.» He was also very fond of detective stories, especially by English authors.

He loved Manzoni. He lived with *The Betrothed* permanently at hand, so he could read a few passages every day.

He wrote daily in his diary, which reflects a panorama of everyday life during the period from 1937 to 1970. It is rich in amusing anecdotes, interesting and pleasant to read.

He liked socialising with his friends, whom he chose carefully from among the prominent and traditional aristocratic and upper-middle class families of Milan.

He went regularly to the Union Club for his almost daily game of *bridge*, which eventually became his favourite pastime.

He was a great conversationalist in the drawing room, but was shy of speaking in public. He learned to open up and relax in front of an audience when he began teaching at the pre-military courses in the Air Force.

His qualities were somewhat unappreciated in a family committed to industry and finance. 1937 was for my father an extremely important year, for two reasons – the birth of his first son and the granting of his military license. It was also the year in which his affections



Franco Gavazzi aboard the Breda 25 at Bresso, in May 1936.

underwent deep changes; his love and appreciation for my mother grew day by day, while he gradually became estranged from his family of origin.

He was extremely religious and had great respect for the members of the clergy and the Church authorities, with whom he sought friendship.

He dedicated himself diligently to the San Vincenzo. He belonged to two different congregations, that of the Duomo and that of his parish church.

He went regularly to confession and to take Holy Communion. Faithful to the precepts of the Church, he often went to Mass more than once on Sundays and public holidays. He felt, therefore, extremely bitter when it became clear that his eldest son Egidio had no interest in religion and, in this field, no desire to follow in his father's footsteps. Whenever he received Holy Communion he prayed that the Lord would grant him the grace of Egidio's conversion.

He tended to become attached to individual members of his Desio staff, clerks and factory workers, often inviting them to spend the holidays at Parravicino as his guests.

The «Sunday drill» (as he called it) in 1938 was: Mass, Communion, lunch in Via Brera, tea and *bridge*, and dinner in Piazza Mentana at his in-laws'.

He liked to remember that he shared the same birthday (July 19) with Egidio senior (1907), Francesco Petrarca (six centuries earlier), the Duchess of Windsor (10 years earlier) and the Tsarevitch of Russia (exactly the same date), «who, however, came to a bad end, at just 14 years old».

Between the age of 40 and 50, my father was afflicted with Parkinson's disease, which limited his activities. He made no mention of it in his diary until 1960, when he spoke of the «tremor in my left arm» in occasion of a medical check-up, in which he was advised to undergo an operation; this he did, in fact, in March 1960. The disease was not cured but, controlled and reduced, stayed with him for the rest of his life (he died in Monza on February 14, 1984).



Margherita Majnoni on her wedding day (June 30, 1935).

Franco Gavazzi and Margherita.

### *The marriage with Margherita Majnoni d'Intignano*

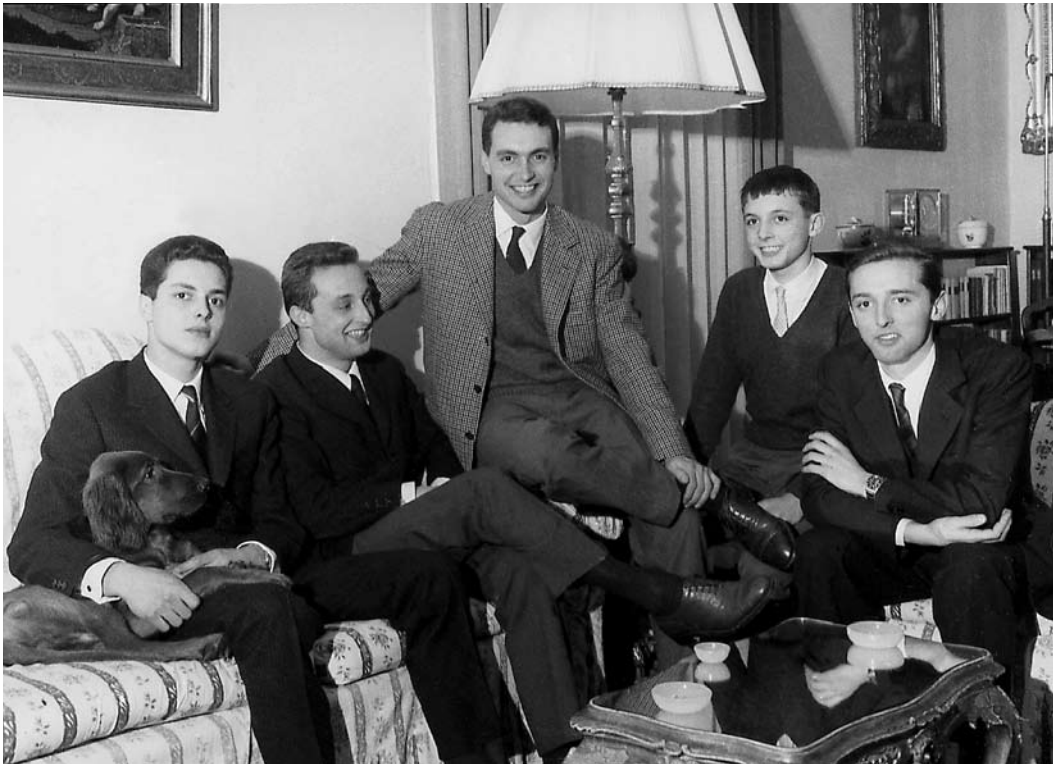
On April 21, 1935 Franco Gavazzi became engaged to «Donna» Margherita Majnoni d'Intignano (b. 26.11.1911), who came from an aristocratic family of fine, ancient and noble tradition. The Majnoni family boasted Generals (including one who is commemorated in the Arc de Triomphe in Paris), Senators, Ministers of War, and even genuine heroes.

The engagement took place by telegram, as my mother was living at the time with her parents in Bologna<sup>22</sup>. On June 30, 1935 the couple were married in the little church of Casiglio (Erba).

Daughter of Count and General Gerolamo and Maria Rossi, from Schio, my mother was an angelic, virtuous woman. My father wrote in his diary: «The date of June 30, 1935 has made a new man of me – I pray to heaven now that all the dross of the past, all of it, that I remember with bitterness, might fall away from my character and my nature.»

<sup>22</sup> On the same day two very sad events occurred – the untimely death of Gino Gavazzi (see chapter 10), and a tragic accident at Belvedere di Alserio, in which a young man named Mazzola was knocked down and killed by my father's car (he was later tried and acquitted for lack of evidence).





Milan in the 1960s. The five sons of Franco Gavazzi and Margherita Majnoni d'Intignano; from left: Gerolamo with the family dog, Chicco, Stefano, Marco, Paolo and Egidio.

### *The children*

Of the five sons, there was Egidio, the eldest, born in 1937 at Parravicino d'Erba, in the Belgiojoso house of Aunt Mamà, where the family spent the Summer months; Stefano, born in 1939 at n. 21 Via Cappuccio; Marco, born in 1940 at n. 18 Via Brera, and myself (1943) and Paolo (1947), both born at n. 4 Via S. Pietro, in Desio.

### *Franco's homes*

Franco lived in the Gavazzi house at n.18 Via Brera, Milan, until he married and moved to n. 21 Via Cappuccio. Years later, in 1942, he went with his family to live in Desio, at n. 16 Via S. Pietro (previously no. 4), where he remained for nine years.

He very much enjoyed spending the summer in Parravicino, Brianza, at Aunt Mamà's house, from where he commuted to Milan.

«When I am in Parravicino I feel totally «brianzolo» [a Brianza local]: this dear old strip of land is so deeply my own, I know so well every corner, every path, every perspective of this area that I feel I am in my primordial and original element.»

He was not fond of Desio; he considered it an ugly place situated at a very short distance from an infinity of beautiful and picturesque places. In Desio, moreover, lived the relatives he disliked. When, along with Rodolfo and his sisters, Franco received his inheritance, all the property they owned in the town was sold. From his diary, January 2, 1951: «In the afternoon I went to Desio, for an appointment with Colleoni to finalise certain deeds of sale and draw up other contracts. We are liquidating the property in Desio – real estate of this type has



Desio, October 1940. Margherita with Egidio and Stefano.



The house at San Michele del Carso no. 17, Milan.

Right: the much-loved villa of Torricella in a period print.



The inner courtyard of the Milan house in a painting by Giannino Grossi.



today become a luxury we cannot afford and we made the right decision to sell it off a little at a time. That of selling the house was not so right; however, since I have exhausted all my ill feeling for this move, which I was actually very much against, I have no wish to dwell on it.» He did, nevertheless, choose to keep for himself a small votive chapel dedicated to the «Madonna del Pilastrell», on the corner of Via Trento and Via Milano.

In 1950 he bought and moved to the house at n. 17 Viale San Michele del Carso, Milan, and in 1952 he bought a house he loved greatly, in Torricella a Erba (Como). Even before moving there, when it was still in the restoration stage (1952-53), he used to take long walks in the area with Pippo (his dog). «It is strange how at Torricella I already feel I have put down roots, so to speak – it is an impression I did not even have in Desio.»

In the 1950s he had the idea that the little Church of San Bernardino, near Torricella, concealed frescoes from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. His intuition was confirmed when, as a result of his insistence, the walls were scraped and samples were taken. He then sponsored the unveiling, cleaning and restoration of the frescoes.

In 1961 he bought, with his children's money, the «Usellera» – a small piece of land with a cottage at Carella, overlooking Lake Pusiano, with a beautiful view. In December 1966 he sold a part of this land (a little over 2,000 m<sup>2</sup>), and in 1967 he sold the rest.

### *Household staff*

The family home, in addition to the numerous offspring, was also populated by the following household staff:

– the cook, Antonietta Confalonieri, from Desio, small, round and extremely good-natured. She always bore the harassment from us five boys with a smile and was very attached to the family. When, after many years of service, she had to leave us and go back to Desio, she was given back the small amount of savings she had kept in a bank account through my father. This proved to be a difficult operation, because she insisted that giving the money to my

father was much safer than putting it in the bank;

- Giannina Malberti, also from Desio and a typical Brianza woman; she was first a maid and later became the cook when Antonietta retired. She also was extremely attached to the family;
- a manservant and driver, Angelo Isola, who later fell in love with another maid, Anna Maria Fusi, of Torricella, whom he subsequently married;
- the *fräulein* (from the Upper Adige Valley) who looked after the children and taught German;
- lastly, there was Antonio Brusadelli and his family, who lived in an apartment in the house. Brusadelli was a former employee of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company. He worked as the family administrator, paying the household staff, keeping the books, paying bills, collecting rents, dividends, etc. My father called him his «minister of finance».



### *My maternal grandparents*

We used to spend part of the summer at Castelnuovo d'Erba with my maternal grandparents of the Majnoni d'Intignano family.

According to the Majnoni family tradition, all the male members were expected to follow a military career. And so it was that my grandfather, great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather, and so on, all became generals of the cavalry.

One member of the family fought with Napoleon and his name, as we have said, is recorded on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

My great-grandfather Luigi Majnoni was a hero in the Italian War of Independence<sup>23</sup>. Many of the Majnoni family were decorated with medals for military valour.

It was, in short, a rather exceptional family, and the expression of an age in which values and virtues that today are long out of fashion were given prime importance.

Obviously, so much glory and sense of duty had not, over the centuries, brought material well-being. The philosophy of the family, therefore, was that of marrying (or attempting

The votive chapel "Madonna del Pilastrell" on the corner of Via Milano and Via Trento in Desio. This was the only "property" that my father chose to keep in Desio.

Gerolamo Majnoni d'Intignano in the uniform of the Order of Malta.



<sup>23</sup> One very singular heroic battle fought by my great-grandfather Luigi Majnoni has been well reconstructed, after thorough research, by Enrico G. Arrigoni, counsellor of the Society of Solferino and San Martino, in the book published for the Lion's Club: *Toussaint De La Motte: centotrent'anni dopo, San Martino della Battaglia*, June 22, 1989: «The battle of Solferino and San Martino, which holds such an important place in Italian history, was fought on June 24, 1859.

There were, however, in the background, a series of very short and rapid skirmishes between the enemy vanguards, which took place in the same locality on June 22. These were small clashes, the significance and memory of which quickly faded, eclipsed by the great battles that, two days later, involved hundreds of thousands of men from three armies – those of Austria, France and Sardinia – and resulted in enormous numbers of dead and wounded.

Of one of these small skirmishes, however, there remains a tangible testimony – a little votive chapel, almost hidden from sight near the tollbooth of the motorway, which tells a story of bravery and death but also of romantic compassion.

On June 21 the French and Sardinian armies had crossed the river Chiese and were arrayed on a front of around twenty kilometres between Lonato and Carpenedolo; the Austrian army, meanwhile, was camped on the left bank of the Mincio, between Peschiera and Goito.

Count Luigi Majnoni d'Intignano, hero of Italian independence, grandfather of Margherita Majnoni.



Both sides were uncertain of the enemy's position, and so, on the evening of the 21st, the Austrian General Staff sent a strong reconnaissance unit across the river, which crossed the bridge at Monzambano and entered the village of Pozzolengo at 8 o'clock in the evening, where it stopped for the night.

The reconnaissance unit was led by Major Giovanni Appel, who was later, in 1900, to become the commander of an army corps in Sarajevo. The unit was made up of the fifth squadron of the first regiment of the Hussars of the Emperor, the third squadron of the twelfth regiment of the Ulans of the King of the Two Sicilies, and two parts of the second mounted battery of the fifth artillery regiment; altogether around 350 men, all on horseback.

The Hussars wore a Hungarian-style uniform, showy and elegant, composed of a short jacket (*attilas*) and tight trousers, all in dark blue, with Hungarian boots and a hat (*shakò*) in the grass-green colour of the regiment, gold braidings and a large white cape; as weapons they carried the officer's or troop's cavalry sabre, model 1845, and a large cavalry pistol, model 1844.

The Ulans wore a jacket (*uhlanka*) and trousers in dark green with braidings in crimson, the colour of the regiment, short boots under the trousers, a Polish-type hat (*czapka*) trimmed with crimson on the upper part, and gold buttons; as weapons they carried a short lance, the cavalry sabre and two holster pistols on the saddle; for each squadron of Ulans, sixteen men were armed in the same way as the Hussars.

The artillery regiment wore a brown tunic and light blue trousers, trimmed in scarlet and edged with black leather for the mounted detachments, the customary Austrian kepi and gold buttons; they carried a short musket and the cavalry sabre; there were eight cannons for each battery – six of which weighed six libras, and the two shorter ones weighing seven libras; each had a smooth bore and was pulled by three pairs of horses.

On the 22nd, at 3 o'clock in the morning, when dawn was just beginning to break, the reconnaissance unit left Pozzolengo, taking the Lugana road towards Rivoltella; their orders were to arrive as far as the railway crossing (which already existed in those days in its present-day location); not to go beyond it but, staying below it, south of the railway ballast, move towards Desenzano and then Lonato, and to inspect all the fields and farms along the way.

At the same time, the Sardinian General Staff had also had the same idea, although from the opposite side. Consequently, at 3 o'clock in the morning another reconnaissance unit, belonging to the third division and led by General Filiberto Mollard, left Rivoltella. This was formed by a platoon of the Light Cavalrymen of Monferrato, under the command of Lieutenant De Michelis, and the fortieth Bersaglieri company, in the command of Captain Caldellary. In all, there were 130 men, most of whom were on foot and therefore at a great disadvantage compared to the Appel reconnaissance patrol, which, on the other hand, was unnecessarily numerous.

The Light Cavalrymen wore a deep blue tunic and grey trousers with braidings in crimson, the colour of the regiment, and a crimson kepi with horse's mane; they carried a Light Cavalry sabre, model 1834, and a special rifled musket. The bersaglieri (sharpshooters) wore a very dark, almost black tunic, trousers and gaiters in white cloth, and their characteristic round, broad-brimmed helmet with a tuft of yellow cock-feathers; as weapons they carried the precision rifle of the bersagliere, model 1856, and a dagger-bayonet.

The Sardinian reconnaissance headed for Pozzolengo from Rivoltella. At the head of the column, slightly in the lead, were two light cavalrymen who had already covered the road the day before – Lance Corporal Peiroun and a volunteer.

It was inevitable that the two units should meet. In fact, at 4 am, when it was now light, two Hussars at the head of the Austrian column saw ahead of them, at a distance of around 100 metres, the two Sardinian cavalrymen, on the exact level of the Chiodino farm, that still exists and is inhabited today. It is situated slightly opposite and to the left of the motorway exit, on the right side of the Lugana road coming from Rivoltella, where the level of the road is lower than the surrounding fields.

The Hussars were easily recognisable in their white capes; the capes of the Light Cavalrymen had become drenched with rain the night before and were carried rolled up on the saddle. From that quite considerable distance the two units exchanged a few harmless musket shots (their firearms were very inaccurate) and then the Austrians turned their horses around and withdrew, disappearing over a hump. The lance corporal stopped and began to turn back, but the volunteer, forgetting that a scout's duty was not to attack but to sight the enemy and then report the news to the base, promptly set off in hot pursuit of the two Hussars. This was a brave but rash action and, in fact, the reckless cavalryman was immediately spied by other Hussars who, led by a lieutenant, surrounded him and tried to strike him with their sabres or unsaddle him.

At this point, we must introduce the contenders. The Light Cavalryman was Count Luigi Majnoni di Intignano, Milanese, discharged in Piedmont, who had joined the Sardinian army as an ordinary cavalryman; he was then 18 years old. The Hussar was Count Toussaint de la Motte, descendant of a very ancient French family originating from Lorena and whose noble title is believed to date back as far as the Middle Ages; one of his ancestors had even taken part in the famous challenge of Barletta in 1503.

During the French Revolution, in order to avoid meeting the same fate as Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, the family fled to Austria. They were Legitimists, therefore, and our cavalryman, born in Austria, enlisted with his brother in the regiment of the Hussars of the Emperor, the most prestigious in all the Austrian army, and had just arrived in Mantua. He held the rank of lieutenant, and must also have been very young.

To return to the story, the uneven struggle continued, and things were looking very bad for Majnoni d'Intignano; he had received a blow from a sabre on his kepi, which, being reinforced with metal, had warded off the blow; however, he was wounded on one hand, another blow had broken the rifle he held slung across his shoulder, and he was being attacked from the right by the enemy officer and from the left by the rest of the group. Fortunately, Sergeant Marmont, of Savoy, who had seen what was happening from a distance, rushed to his aid and, being an expert horseman and a strong sabre fighter, succeeded in freeing him from the encirclement of the Hussars and both retreated at a gallop towards the railway.

At this point, Lieutenant Toussaint and four of his companions, instead of going back to report the outcome of the fight, set off at full speed in pursuit of the two cavalrymen, committing the same mistake as Majnoni, but this time with tragic results. The captain of the bersaglieri, in fact, foreseeing the attack, had hidden his men at the side of the road behind some bushes and, when the two cavalrymen arrived with the five Hussars at their heels, he let the pair pass and then showered the enemy with a barrage of close-range artillery fire. The Hussar Anton Papp died along with his horse, Lieutenant de la Motte was wounded

but remained in the saddle, the Austrian cavalymen arrived as far as the bar of the level crossing, which had been lowered and where other bersaglieri were waiting for them, turned their horses around and retreated back, to be met by another round of artillery fire. Corporal Gera and Hussar Bartok were thrown from their horses and managed to reach Peschiera the next day on foot, Toussaint de la Motte was wounded again and fell from his horse, and the surviving Hussar took his commander's mount and fled back to his own lines.

So ended the skirmish, known to Italian historians as the battle of «Majnoni d'Intignano» and to the Austrians as the battle of «Chiodino».

Naturally, the incident had different consequences in both camps. Major Appel, warned that the railway crossing on the Lugana road was guarded by enemy soldiers, chose another practicable road for his two cannons; a deviation was therefore made over the hill of San Martino, descending at the Contracania farm and passing through Selva and Montonale to arrive at San Pietro, Centenaro and Castel Venzago. Here they fought another bloody battle with a patrol of the Light Cavalymen of Saluzzo, in which they lost Baron Vecsey, the Hungarian Captain of the Hussars, and then continued on in their reconnaissance mission, which we cannot follow now but which certainly deserves recognition for the mere fact that, in less than 24 hours, taking with them two cannons and fighting battles along the way, they covered a distance of 52 kilometres, which, in those days, was a good deal. Suffice it to say that on June 24 Emperor Franz Josef himself, whom the Appel reconnaissance had provided with a great deal of news, wrote in a letter to Empress Elisabeth from Villafranca: «This morning an advance patrol command of cavalymen engaged in several clashes with the Piedmontese, during which, unfortunately, the Captain of the Cavalry, Baron Vecsey, and Lieutenant Count La Motte of the imperial Hussars, who fought with temerity, were killed».

The Light Cavalymen of Monferrato and the Bersaglieri withdrew immediately to Rivoltella, taking with them the two wounded horses, which were considered as war booty and, according to the «Regulations on the Service of Troops in the Field», promptly auctioned off for the sum of 902 francs, which were divided among the 104 bersaglieri and the 24 light cavalymen. The officers gave up their own shares in favour of their subordinates, and so each man received 7.20 francs, which was not a small amount; this curious tradition recalls the ancient customs of the Mercenary Troops.

The two valiant soldiers were called to report to General Mollard, who heard their stories, inspected Majnoni's kepi (Marmont's had been knocked from his head by a sabre blow) and examined their sabres with the blades serrated from the struggle (Majnoni's sabre is kept in the Museum of San Martino and does, in fact, have two notches halfway down the blade). He then proposed that Marmont be awarded an honourable mention (equivalent to the present-day bronze medal) and asked whether Majnoni preferred the honourable mention or an officer's commission.

Count Majnoni d'Intignano chose the second option. This proved to be the right choice, as he went on to glorious career – Commander of the Lancers of Novara, Brigade General and so on, until finally becoming Lieutenant-General, Cavalry Arms Inspector, Minister of War, Senator of the Kingdom and President of the Red Cross. He died in 1918; he must certainly have thought back innumerable times to that morning of June 22, 1859, which for him spelled glory and success.

Only for him, however; for Lieutenant Count Toussaint de la Motte, as brave as he was unfortunate, it meant his death. Before breathing his last, as he lay mortally wounded by the roadside, he asked whether he was in the hands of the Piedmontese or the French, and died with the consolation of knowing that at least it had not been his own fellow countrymen who had killed him. He was immediately identified by some papers he was carrying, after which the cavalymen quickly departed and his body remained abandoned for the whole day.

Only later, during the night, it seems, was he hurriedly buried in the field by the side of the road by the local peasants, who marked his grave with a rough wooden cross.

Two days later, in this very field, the great battle was fought, in which thousands of soldiers lost their lives.

In the following year of 1860, the death of Toussaint was again mentioned by a writer in a description of the battlefield scarred with countless single graves and enormous communal graves, over which the grass had not yet grown. «There», says the writer, «close to Lugana, a cross stands on a grave, protected by railings so that feet do not profane the home of a dead warrior».

A few years later (the exact date is not known), the mother of Toussaint had a small votive chapel built over the grave and placed against the far wall a large black wooden cross with a metal plaque, upon which was this inscription: «Here lies Count de la Motte I.R.. first lieutenant, fallen on June 22, 1859. May his soul rest in peace. Placed by his disconsolate relatives». At the foot of the cross a white marble headstone bears the words: «Pro Deo – Reg Patria – Familia mortuum. Unus aeternus Deus nunc protegi»; for many years following, in a nearby church that we have not been able to identify, a Mass was held for his soul.

In 1887 Quinto Cenni, a well-known painter of military scenes, painted a picture of the fight between Majnoni and the Hussars of which, in the painting, there are thirteen. It is painted in the bright colours characteristic of the works of Cenni, with special attention to the various uniforms, as was his habit, and, obviously, throwing into relief the figure of the Italian cavalryman. The painting is entitled «Reconnaissance of the Piedmontese Cavalry on June 22, 1859 – Episode of Volunteer Luigi Majnoni di Intignano of the Light Cavalry of Monferrato, enlisted at Vigevano in the Sardinian Army on February 18, 1859». No mention is made of Toussaint de la Motte who, however, is clearly depicted with a large white cape.

The year passed, and in 1909, on the fiftieth anniversary of the battle, in the *Proceedings of the Seventh Congress of Survivors of the Native Battles* we find a short reference, which says: «along with Toussaint de la Motte was buried also his loyal attendant». On the same occasion a long article also appeared in a magazine of the Austrian cavalry, in which the story of the Appel reconnaissance was told in great detail, including a brief account of the Chiodino battle (it is partly from this article that we have drawn our information).

In 1910 a colossal work in six volumes was published by the History Department of the Italian General Staff on the entire 1859 campaign, and here we find an account of the episode of Toussaint de la Motte, including the reproduction of many documents. Then, other events and other wars, both Italian and Austrian. History slowly began to fade and, as always happens, legend replaced it and was passed down through the generations by the local people – the grieving mother who for years came to visit the tomb of her son, but could never find the courage to approach the chapel, choosing rather to gaze upon it from afar; the fiancé who waited long and in vain in Mantua; the faithful dog who was buried along with his master; the high Austrian official who,



*Reconnaissance of the Piedmontese Cavalry on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1859 (Quinto Cenni, 1887).*

The painting portrays the battle between Luigi Majnoni d'Intignano of the Monferrato Light Cavalry and the Hussars. Majnoni had enlisted in the Sardinian Army on February 18, 1859, at Vigevano.



View of the small chapel erected in commemoration of Count Toussaint de la Motte.

Inside views of the chapel.



Here lies  
Count de la Motte  
I.R. First Lieutenant  
Fallen here  
The 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1859  
May his soul rest in peace  
Mourned by his desolate family

to marry) into wealthy families, which could guarantee them a certain degree of comfort. Nevertheless, my grandfather did own a fine building in Piazza Mentana, Milan and a pleasant villa in the countryside.

The lifestyle of the family is well described by my mother in the following notes, made during the years 1976–1980.

after the 1915–18 war, came to Lake Garda in search of his unfortunate ancestor; lastly, the silence and oblivion of the place has since been made more pronounced by the fact that the family of de la Motte died out in 1928 and that, in the creation of the motorway flyover, the Lugana road has been moved East, leaving the little chapel in a quiet corner away from the traffic.

In 1959, on the occasion of its centennial, the little building was whitewashed; its story, however, had almost completely faded – all that was commonly known was that it marked the place where a valiant Austrian officer died during the great battle.

A few years ago, during the re-organisation of historical monuments, the Board of the Solferino and San Martino Society made an inspection of the chapel and were intrigued by the date engraved on the metal plaque, which was just barely readable: June 22. This meant that here someone died two days before the great battle, but why? It was truly a mystery.

Investigations were made, and the story we have told above finally came to light; it was also discovered that the chapel, unlike many other evocative and funereal monuments in the area, was not the property of the Solferino and San Martino society; it belonged to no-one.

It became important, therefore, to restore both a historical significance and a presentable appearance to the chapel – a project organised by the Lions Club of Desenzano and thanks especially to the dedication and research of members Fornari and Tecchio in co-operation with the Worthese Lions Club of Klagenfurt and the Austrian Schwarze Kreuze, who generously sponsored the complete restoration works.

First of all, though, it was necessary to establish whether there were remains buried under the earthen floor of the little chapel and, if so, to identify them. There were no existing records, but it was possible to make some guesses – the body may have been taken to Vienna by relatives, although this would not explain the erection of the chapel; it may have been exhumed in 1870 when the large ossuaries (still existing today) were set up and consequently all the graves in the area were opened, or perhaps it was still in place, along with the remains of the faithful dog, as tradition tells (I had not yet discovered the documents mentioned above).

In the winter of 1988 the Lions Club of Desenzano Lago carried out a superficial investigation, which revealed nothing yet was not convincing; the following May 19, 1989, therefore, digging began again, this time in earnest, and finally the great discovery was made.

At a depth of 90 centimetres, beneath the floor of the chapel, exactly in the centre, the bones of two human skeletons were unearthed.

It is not our task here to give a detailed report of the exhumation and the finds; someone else may do so at another time. I can only guarantee that it was indeed a very interesting and moving discovery for those present. Suffice it to say that two complete skeletons were found. One was lying face upwards and composed in the bottom of the grave (there was no trace of a coffin), with the metal badge of his kepi, bearing the two-headed Hapsburg eagle, on his solar plexus and eleven silver coins on the right side, at the level of his pelvis; the other lay on its side, somewhat contracted, to the right of the first. Nothing else came to light, even though the entire surrounding area was sifted, except a small chin buckle from the kepi.

The lengths of the two bodies were 170 cm and 180 cm respectively; each had perfect teeth, showing that they were both young. The skull of the one on his back, moreover, judging from certain anatomic features (incomplete ossification of the cranium) proved to belong to a very young person, under twenty years old. It remained now to determine which was Toussaint de la Motte and which was his attendant, and this was done through a few simple observations.

One of the skeletons had been lowered into the grave first and his kepi placed carefully on his chest as a sign of respect, and he had a fair sum of money in his pocket (more than five silver florins, which was unlikely for a simple soldier to be carrying); the other had been put into the grave rather carelessly, on his side and without his helmet. They had been buried by the peasants who, though not military, had in this simple but very ancient ritual unconsciously respected the rules of hierarchy, and so we concluded that the skeleton facing upwards was that of Toussaint de la Motte and the other of the Hussar Anton Papp; perhaps his orderly. No spurs, bootnails or cloak clasps were found, as the boots and cloaks must certainly have been removed before the hasty burial, nor buttons, because the Hussar uniform had only braidings and toggles in wood or horn; there was no dog, but only the faithful orderly – the term «faithful», in fact, had confused the story with another similar episode in Solferino, in which a French officer's dog had indeed died on its master's grave.

Today the little chapel, which is enclosed by iron railings and whose brick structure, still solid, measures 285 cm by 285 cm with a height of 380 cm and with an apse protruding by 70 cm, has been completely restored and repainted.

Inside the building, the cross, plaque and memorial slab, now legible, have retained their original position; outside, meanwhile, the lawn, trees and pathway have been reorganised, and on the façade a black marble tablet commemorates in gold letters the restoration carried out by the Austrian authorities.

Inside the little chapel a small, cubic (one metre on each side) construction in brick was erected and here, on June 24, 1989, with an evocative ceremony in the presence of civil, military and religious figures, both Italian and Austrian, in compliance with the wishes of the soldier's mother, the remains of the two Hussars of the Emperor were placed in two zinc caskets sealed with a brass plate.

Before the simple Italian plaque and the austere Latin slab the two will rest in peace for many long years to come, and the story they will tell will no longer be a legend but a true story of two valiant and unfortunate warriors, whose ideals brought them to a premature death, but whose Death earned them a place in History.»



## MEMORIES WRITTEN BY MY MOTHER: MARGHERITA MAJNONI D'INTIGNANO (B. 1911)

### *Education*

« I had a 19<sup>th</sup> Century education. Ladies were supposed to be brilliant in society, educational qualifications were considered totally useless scraps of paper. It was inconvenient to attend school, as one had to return to town prematurely, and it was not possible to be absent during the year. Therefore: the first year of primary school was at home; the second year also, but with great regret; exams were at the end of the school year, at the school in Parravicino (we were already living in the country) with the teacher, Miss Fusi, who taught the first three years of primary school all together in the same classroom. She had the habit of organising her pupils in rows according to their height, but every now and again some changed their clogs and with the new ones gained five centimetres in height, which meant they were sent to the end of the row; the third year at home, with exams in Via Ruffini; the fourth year at school! In Via Ansperto, on the corner with Via Luini; I arrived in November (after All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day and the November 4th anniversary). I attended until Christmas, then I caught scarlet fever.

Quarantine at home in my grandmother's room. Mother was also isolated; one of the most wonderful periods of my life (I felt fine), I had Mamma all to myself – she amused me, she read me delightful books. Once a week the men of the town hall came to pick up the laundry, which had to be washed separately for the sake of hygiene, I do not know where. Mamma called them the «monatti» [term used in Lombardy to signify the nurses and gravediggers of plague victims]. After the scarlet fever (40 days) it was useless to go back to school, so I began to study again at home. Exams were held in Monza (it was customary, for the sake of convenience, for pupils to take the exam where they were). The exam of the fourth year of primary school was called the diploma exam, because it marked the end of the compulsory educational cycle. There was also a fifth year but not everyone attended it. The result of the exam represents my official educational qualifications; I have no other.

I then went on to the Manzoni High School, with Prof. Attilio De Stefani – an old-fashioned teacher: good, fatherly and well-respected.

The class was 1/3 girls and 2/3 boys. Among my classmates there was Bice Roncaldier, a distant cousin who became my life-long friend, Rosita Beati, first in the class, who later married Nobel Prizewinner Prof. Natta, and a sweet, blonde, Jewish girl named Benedetta, who later died in an attempt to escape from a concentration camp.

The cleverest boys in the class included Santagostino and Scherillo, who was the son of a famous professor of the time.

The first year of high school ended well with no difficulties.



Margherita Majnoni d'Intignano, portrayed in the Taccoli home in Monza by an accomplished artist who was at the time (early 1920s) doing his military service in the local garrison and whose name is today unknown.



Margherita Majnoni d'Intignano at 9 years old, in a portrait by Margherita Belgiojoso Confalonieri dated 20/05/1921.



Margherita Majnoni  
d'Intignano, in Desio with  
a raccoon.

The second did not. Halfway through the year, after an illness, it was decided that I should not be sent back to school. I took my exams at the end of the year and then the third year I did at home.

Exams: failed in Italian and Latin. The decision to suspend studies; it was too inconvenient having to return to town prematurely for extra lessons and exams, and also because for a girl regular studies were in any case superfluous.

This did not mean that I should remain ignorant. I began a series of studies with various teachers and professors who came to teach me at home.

The subjects were: Italian, History, History of Art, History of Philosophy, English, French, German and piano, which was alternated with drawing, painting and literature, a great deal of literature. I enjoyed studying, and I also liked reading in English and French; I even managed to get through two books in German. There had also been an attempt at singing lessons, which was immediately abandoned, as I proved not to have the slightest ear for music.

And this is my curriculum of studies. >>

### *The Majnoni household staff*

<< The mainstays of the house were Luisina (from Monza) and Carolina (from Lissone). Luisina was my mother's maid, she helped her to dress and do her hair, and looked after her clothes, but apart from this I do not know what she did. The household linen was sent to the laundryman in large white bags. When it came back it was ironed by a day ironer, who used irons heated on an octagonal coal stove. The washerwoman who did the coloured wash (which had to be washed separately) also worked by the day, as did Conforta, an old lady who did the sewing.

I remember Conforta still, sitting by the window; she sewed all our underclothes (the linens were not bought ready-made but were hand-sewn to allow for growth.

«Conforta's drawers» (which were, in fact, enormous articles) became a famous household term to signify anything that was bigger than necessary.

Now we move to the kitchen – the domain of Carolina.

Here as well the «do-it-yourself» system ruled. The chickens were bought live, and kept in a hencoop in the larder. It was the cook's task to kill and pluck them; it was a necessity, and I remember the atrocious hencoop packed with clucking chickens.

To keep the food fresh there was the ice-box – a large cupboard that opened at the top, with blocks of dripping ice inside. Copper pans hung on a wooden frame on the wall; hot water was stored in a compartment of the «economic stove», which was heated with wood and coal (the running water was only cold).

There was a second maid who took care of us three and our «Missie».

There were also menservants, whom I remember little of as they changed frequently, and my father's orderly. My father placed great emphasis on physical appearance and

very little a person's ability, so these young soldiers were often terribly stupid. Nowadays, these employees seem extremely numerous, but in other families we knew there were also the butler, the first and second menservants, the scullery maid and the chauffeur. >>

### *Grumello*

<< In September we would go to spend a short time at the home of Granny Rita at Grumello, an 18th Century gem of a place, totally unspoiled. It has remained in the past also with regard to utilities – no telephone, no electricity. We spent the evenings sitting around a paraffin lamp, and then each would take his candle and go to bed. Every morning in the pantry there would be a long line of candlesticks waiting to be cleaned of the wax drippings.

The specialities of Grumello were grapes and Bergamo-style white polenta – each was served with afternoon tea, the polenta in very thin crisp-fried slices.

Granny had the habit of speaking in dialect with the household staff and also with the local peasants; however, she spoke in Milanese and they in the dialect of Bergamo, and they barely understood each other! >>

### *A few memoirs*

<< I met Rabindranath Tagore, a famous Indian philosopher!

He was passing through Milan at the time, and Nino and Nerina Medici, who had met him in India, went to visit him in his hotel with my grandmother, my mother and I. I remember this old, white-haired man with a long white beard, half-reclining in a small parlour, all in green.

Other acquaintances were Alessandro and Poldo [?] Casati; he was a well-known anti-Fascist. We used to go and visit them in Arcore, in the house that today belongs to Berlusconi.

Once they came to see us in Monza with Elena Croce, the daughter of Benedetto, who was around my age. We walked together in the garden.

I remember my first time in a lift, in a hotel in Rome. It was large, and open on one side with a rope hanging down; the lift-boy pulled or released this rope to work the lift.

In Desio the children's classmates always felt at home. They used to come and do their homework in the garden and watch the newborn baby being bathed. >>

### *The Majnoni household*

<< The family was characterised by its almost medieval virtues. The careers considered suitable for the males of the family were either of a military, diplomatic or ecclesiastical nature, but in our house this culture was not very much appreciated.



Portrait of Margherita Gavazzi in a relaxed pose.

There reigned a patriotic spirit that had been passed down from my great-grandfather, who went off to fight as a volunteer in 1859 with his brother, crossing the Ticino in a hay-cart.

Courage was an undisputed virtue. Its lack was considered not so much an offence as a true disgrace.

During the war, a bomb happened to fall on Erba, close to Villincino, where old Aunt Maria lived alone.

I overheard my parents talking about the incident; the problem was whether to telephone her for the sake of solidarity or whether the mere fact of ringing might give her the impression that they thought she might be shaken. They did eventually telephone, but only after having carefully thought about what to say.

With regard to the careers worthy of nobility, my father was perplexed on the nomination of his successor, when for reasons of age and health, he resigned from his mandate (in the Order of Malta) as Balì representative for Lombardy and Veneto. The name of Scipione Belgiojoso (who did, in fact, take his place) was put forward; however, he was a notary and, as such, although a very worthy person, he was not considered prestigious enough for the position.

My father was extremely faithful to duty and orders. He understood nothing – on September 8th a bewildered young soldier appeared at the house in light-coloured civilian clothes, running from the Germans. Father told him to give himself up because those were the orders. I do not think he obeyed.

After leaving military service, my father dedicated a great deal of his time not only to the Order of Malta but also to the Dante Alighieri Association, which concerned itself with Italian schools abroad.

Uncle Achille had been architect for everyone in Milanese society.

In all the houses and villas his style and his excellent taste was evident. He was present at the assassination of King Humbert I and I think it was he who was sent to the Queen and to inform the Duchess Litta.

In Milan he lived in the Royal Palace, and later moved to Villincino.

Old and gouty as he was, he never left his armchair, yet he received everyone, from the Count of Turin to the schoolteacher, from Albertini of the *Corriere* to us grandchildren.

He always made everyone feel at ease and liked a pleasant conversation (with a touch of gossip, but no less enjoyable for that). We children were also glad to visit him frequently. Once, to our great delight, he invited us to a lunch full of sweet things – soup, chestnuts in milk, meat with jam sauce, bread and «panettone» [a typical cake with raisins and candied fruit].

He used to enjoy amazing us by throwing coloured powder in the fountain of the courtyard to change the colour of the water.

His wife, Aunt Maria, was from Tuscany. She had learnt the Milanese dialect, which in those days was spoken in all families, and spoke it quite correctly, but with a Tuscan accent! Theirs was a picturesque marriage, yet full of charm.

She was «tall, solemn and dressed in black», with a characteristic figure, and was known and loved throughout Erba. >>

### *Monza – Villa Tacoli*

<< The house in Monza still remains one of the most central memories of the happiest times of my childhood and youth.

It was bought by my grandfather, Giuseppe Rossi<sup>24</sup>, a shy and introverted man, as a country retreat.

At the time of purchase it was called Villa Belvedere [«beautiful view»], as it had a tower that provided a view over the surrounding countryside. I do not think, however, that this view was particularly beautiful, only fields dotted with mulberry trees, on plains stretching out as far as the eye could see. On very clear days (rare on the plains of Lombardy) it was possible to see the Alps and the famous Monte Rosa.

My grandfather had part of the villa pulled down, including the tower; he kept the cottages and the farmhouses because the property was extensive, and he rebuilt the house very well, in bare brick, in a sober, classic, elegant style.

He created the garden (that now would be called a park), which is still intact and across which the Milan–Chiasso railway passes in an entrenchment.

This railway line was one of the main attractions of our stays in Monza. The garden had also two small hills, which had probably been created with the earth removed for the entrenchment.

The queen and guardian angel of the house was Aunt Anna, or «z'Anna» [short for «Zia Anna», or Aunt Anna], as we called her.

My grandparents died when I was still small; I only remember them vaguely.

They had had six daughters, three of whom died in childhood. The surviving three were my mother, Aunt Pina and «z'Anna». This last was physically very deformed, with a hunchback, but she was as kind-hearted, lively, intelligent, spiritual, generous (but here I will stop because I would have to transcribe an entire list of praises) as I have ever known anyone to be, considering the misfortune that had befallen her, denying her a normal life. All the love that she had been unable to bestow on her own children she lavished on her nephews and nieces, we three Majnonis and the seven Tacolis.

Naturally, my grandparents left the house to her, and she looked after it, furnished it with great taste, completely by correspondence, from magazines, photographs and



My mother and my grandmother in a photo from 1912.

<sup>24</sup> Son of the famous Vicenza-born industrialist Alessandro Rossi.

pattern books. Her greatest passion, however, was the garden, which was transformed by her imagination and care.

She had taught the few old pensioners who used to come and sweep the avenues not to weed out any wild flowers that happened to spring up in the middle of the road! The head gardener was Ambrogio, who was also the coachman when necessary. Later, with the arrival of the first automobile, he became the «*chauffeur*», and dressed exactly like his namesake in the Ferrero Rocher television advertisement.

The railway was a source of endless amusement for us children.

When the trains were steam-powered, and we could hear them coming from far off. We would run along the escarpment to see them passing. We also made a friend! At a specific time, we would wait for the passage of a direct train to Switzerland and then we and the cook of the restaurant wagon would wave frantically to each other. He must have found it enormously amusing to see this bunch of rowdy girls (we outnumbered the boys) waving wildly at him.

With the introduction of electric trains, and as we approached adulthood, the thrill diminished considerably. The trains arrived silently and more rapidly; often we did not even have time to see them.

Of course, it was not only the direct trains that passed, but also endless freight trains – those going north, often loaded with blocks of marble; those going south, with coal – so much coal! There was no fuel oil yet. The speed of the trains was greatly conditioned by their loads, as well as by the gradient of the land. Our plain seemed flat, but the trains frequently found the climb a struggle.

Now let us come back to «z'Anna».

She had the knack of satisfying every possible desire of her nephews and nieces even before they were aware of it. She made a «gymnastics room» for us, a little gym with all the equipment – parallel bars, rings, trapeze, poles, rope, rope ladder, etc.; a tennis court (in the vain hope that we might become champions) and a football pitch by the side of the avenue, which became the meeting-place of all the younger boys in the neighbourhood. In those days, the outskirts of Monza was all farmland and the boys were sons of the local farmers, raised according to the old-fashioned traditions, nothing like today.

What counted in «Monza life» at that time was serenity.

Conversation, commenting without complaining, without anxiety – something that was quite different with my aunt on my father's side, where it was often the opposite, even when there was no need.

Then we also learned geography!

The house was laid out quite differently from our houses today. On the ground floor there was a large kitchen, with a kitchen sink and a larder at the side – this was equipped with a hencoop for the chickens that were purchased live and then

killed and plucked by the cook. Near the kitchen was the dining room for the staff, so they did not have to enter the kitchen and disturb the operations.

The manservant was in charge of the pantry, and then there was a second dining room for the people who stayed for a meal, who were not quite close enough to the family to eat at our table but who could not be left to eat with the servants.

Upstairs there was the linen room, which would be full of women reciting the rosary in the afternoon; I can still hear the sounds of the Holy Mary chanted in unison, and their lilting voices as they set the rhythm of household life, breaking into song as they reached the litanies.

Nearby there was the laundry room, with the hot water boiler that was only lit twice a week, on the days when we bathed; otherwise, hot water was brought up from the kitchen in wonderful Abruzzo copper jugs.

My aunt's maid looked after her bedroom and also the little parlour where she received relatives in private.

Then there were a series of rooms designed for various purposes. The mattress room (why on earth did we have so many extra mattresses?), the theatre room (with wardrobes full of costumes) and the archives room, which contained all the issues of the «Corriere» from the years of the First World War. >>

### *The everyday life of a young girl at the beginning of the 1900s*

«I am not yet actually «old». At least I do not have the appearance that is usually associated with the word, and yet, if I think about my life, I feel I was born in another age.

I spent my childhood in an environment whose habits and substance were the reflection of a world that had changed little with respect to the two or three previous centuries.

There were trains, it is true; yet I also travelled in horse-drawn coaches, which were used as an alternative for short journeys, when it was more convenient or appropriate.

I remember going by coach from Castelnuovo to Lecco to take the train for Grumello; also from Monza to Desio, and perhaps from Naples to Pozzuoli.

There were automobiles, but these were for the privileged few, merely an amusing luxury, not to be relied on for long journeys because they invariably suffered breakdowns which the «chauffeur», chosen for his self-professed mechanical skills, was usually unable to fix at the side of the dusty road.

There were telephones, but these were used little – it was not polite to use the telephone to make invitations or express thanks. Orders could not be made by phone, because the shopkeepers did not have one. In our house, the telephone was situated in a hallway and almost hidden, as if it were an unpresentable object.



Another photo of Margherita Gavazzi in Desio, in October 1940, with Egidio and Stefano.



Portraits of Franco and Margherita Gavazzi.

I remember how surprised I was at school one day when I looked up at one of my classmates, as she stood above me on the teacher's dais, and saw that the lace borders of her underclothes were all on the same level as her dress. Our own petticoats peeped out from beneath our dresses, and our drawers showed below both. To make up for it, our thick, ribbed cotton stockings barely covered our knees and were hooked on one side to a piece of elastic, which stretched the stocking on the outside of the leg, leaving a half-moon of bare skin on the opposite side.

The pinafore, of course, was the shortest garment of all; nevertheless, I was the envy of all the other girls because of the belt - decorated with a line of elephants - that encircled my waist (though with little hope of narrowing it due to the volume of the many folds over which they trudged). Running water was not taken very seriously. In Milan we had a bathtub, but the washbasin we used every morning was filled with a jug.

In Castelnovo we did not even have a bathtub; we washed in a tub in the bedroom, and the splashes we made filled a hollow in the brick floor, forming a puddle; this went on for years, until the floors were re-done.

The water jugs had an extremely important function in our houses. In Monza hot water was carried around in shining copper amphoras, which were brought by willing servants in the morning and the evening, as the boiler for the baths was only fired twice a week. These two days were consequently very busy. The «Misses» arranged all the day's tasks around the fact that it was «*bath day*», and it was necessary to organise shifts and make sure that nobody took longer than they should, because this would mean that the last ones would have to postpone their baths to the next time the boiler was lit.

Where there were no baths we had systems for rapidly disposing of the water. In Grumello there was a marble basin outside one of the windows that was connected to the drainpipe, and in Castelnovo a small toilette, which had no taps but a hole in a corner of the floor, where the water drained away.

In the kitchen, in summer, there were charcoal burners fanned by turkey-feather fans, and on the walls hung shiny copper buckets full of drinking-water (that by some miracle remained almost ice-cold), from which all the servants drank, using the same ladle, or «*tazza*» [«cup»].

Naturally, the household staff did not have Sunday off, nor any other day of the week. In their kindness and generosity, however, their employers granted them many free days, and turned a blind eye on the long hours of inactivity during the day.

As children we girls always wore gloves when we went out, even in summer.

We sewed, we embroidered, but we were not allowed to go into the kitchen. We did gymnastics, rode horses and had dancing lessons. This also proved fruitless in my case; unlike the other children, in fact, I found it impossible to tell a waltz from a foxtrot.

I spent most of my time as a wallflower, and I have always hated dancing, as one inevitably hates the source of one's humiliation. Even later, as a young lady, I was known to cry my heart out because I had been forced to attend some party, which in those days were called «balls». These entertainments took place in a magnificent setting, in fine buildings full of works of art, but usually to the sound of a single piano, occasionally accompanied by a violin, and with buffets and refreshments that consisted mainly of lemonade.

Like me, my brother also disliked society life, and made a point of eating raw onions on the day of the event, so as to make himself unpresentable. >>

### *The old ladies*

<< At five o'clock precisely the bell rings: one by one the ladies arrive, to be greeted with kind words, affectionate adjectives and formal enquiries.

The time set for the beginning of a game of bridge or canasta is sacred, and all jokes about the punctuality of women vanish in the context of a game of cards. Within half an hour, in fact, they had all arrived and were sitting with perpendicular geometry at the little, well-lit tables.

I am also one of these priestesses, which the silence, accentuated by the hushed voices, reveals absorbed in a strict ritual; the poison of self-criticism, however, that terrible gift of observing one's own situations like a malicious spectator, works its way into my conscience and shrouds it with melancholy.

Not one of these women is young. I am fond of youth and beauty, I confess; they fill me with joy like the sight of a work of art, but, unfortunately, they do not last, and it is no-one's fault. The problem is precisely that these women seem to feel that they are to blame and, consequently, either they feel ashamed or they try to reject the shame by not facing reality and doing all they can to hide the evidence by following the latest fashions, dyeing their hair and baring their drooping and wrinkled skin (I think they must look in the mirror without wearing their glasses).

It is a bitter struggle living in a world that takes every op-

The five brothers  
Egidio, Stefano, Marco,  
Gerolamo e Paolo.





The five brothers in the late 1940s. Clockwise from top left: Egidio, Stefano, Marco, Gerolamo (the author) and Paolo.



Egidio Gavazzi.

portunity to declare its affinity with the young, in an age that has never abounded so much in elderly people since the beginning of mankind. Perhaps it is the quantity that has depreciated the individual, as happens with merchandise, and in order to remain as long as possible in the privileged group one resorts to certain pathetic efforts, that fool no-one but rather emphasise, through the obviousness of their purpose, the failure of the attempt.

I remember the old ladies of my youth. They did not hide their age – on the contrary, they emphasised and displayed it with pride in their dress and manner.

Their opinion was respected, their friendship sought after; they did not go out in pursuit of entertainment, but entertained in their own homes their little court of relatives, close friends and the usual hangers-on.

They dressed according to the fashion of their youth, adapted and adjusted to not leave a single centimetre of flesh uncov-

ered, and imitated low necklines with «guimpes». In the evening, bedecked with jewels and adorned with a halo of white hair, they dominated the social gatherings and even constituted a decorative element.

It is a realm that no longer exists, that of the elderly person, a realm that lasted for thousands of years, since Homeric times, since Biblical times; today it has been destroyed by progress and by its own kings and queens, who reject their own reason for existence. >>

### **EGIDIO GAVAZZI (1907-1987)**

Born in Milan on July 7, 1907, Egidio graduated in law in 1929 and also attended the Bocconi University.

In 1930, through his kinship with the Pirellis and the inheritance from this family, he joined the Pirelli company and went on to make a brilliant career (according to gossip, thanks largely to his family connections).

He worked until 1948 in various management positions, and was appointed Managing Director and later President of the Pirelli Companhia Industrial Brasileira. So, he moved to Sao Paolo, Brazil, where he lived until 1958. On his return to Italy he was appointed General Manager and later general partner (together with Leopoldo Pirelli and Emanuele Dubini) in Pirelli & Co., as well as board member, representing Pirelli in various important Italian companies including Centrale, the Italian Metalworking Company and the Cantoni Cotton Manufacturing Company<sup>25</sup>.

He was also board member of the Bastogi Finance Company, Italpi, Metalli Italian Metalworking Company, FATME, Setemer, INCET National Industry of Electrical Wiring, Commercial Credit Bank, SIELTE-Ericson Systems, Stelte, Italian Insurance Company, RAS-Adriatic Insurance Assembly, Milan Centre Building Contractors, Italian Company for Southern Railways, Intermobiliare Finance Company, Euromobiliare, Vitruvio, and the Bank of America and Italy, in which he was part of the Executive Committee.

He was Vice President of the Italian section of the International Chamber of Commerce<sup>26</sup>. Egidio was granted a civil pilot's license in the 1930s and frequented the flying club with his cousin Franco, who was also a pilot<sup>27</sup>. Egidio was a member of the Union Club and the «Clubino» (Little Club).

Egidio was born on the same day as Franco, and was three years his junior. «Egidio and I», his cousin wrote, «share the same birthday (July 19th, along with... Francesco Petrarca and the Duchess of Windsor, ... and who knows how many others).» They were very close, and had both a rather «playboy» attitude, at least until they married.

### *The marriage with Ippolita Cicogna Mozzoni*

He married Ippolita of the Cicogna Mozzoni family of counts (b. 26.8.1914), a very attractive woman.

Egidio and Ippolita were physically very youthful. They both appeared many years younger than their true age. They played golf and were members of the Milan Golf Club.

### *A profile of Egidio*

Egidio was one of the major taxpayers of Milan for family taxes. He was somewhat faint-hearted by nature. During the war he continually changed residence, in search of what he felt were the safest locations. From the diary of Franco: «Egidio is even more foreboding, more catastrophic, than ever. He asks me anxiously, What shall I do? Where shall I go? Just like Don Abbondio at the approach of the Lanzichenecchi.»

<sup>25</sup> Pirelli Italiana S.p.A had bought most of the shares in the Cantoni Cotton Manufacturing Company. Egidio was appointed board member in the meeting of March 30, 1940, and in the meeting of April 23, 1968 he was one of the various board members to be re-appointed for another three years.

<sup>26</sup> During his term in office, on May 11, 1961, in a meeting held in Turin on «Private Companies and Economic Expansion in Developing Countries», Egidio gave an important talk in favour of liberalisation of international trade, expressing intelligent and modern views and a Liberalist philosophy.

<sup>27</sup> The newspaper 'Le Vie dell'Aria' published this «letter from Berlin» in 1936:

«An attractive flying programme was planned for the days immediately preceding the Olympics. The great aviators' meeting of Rangsdorf, where over 150 German aeroplanes and some fifty foreign planes reached their destination, did not offer any particularly noteworthy characteristics compared to the dozens of other meetings that are held one after another around Europe during the good season. Only one Italian took part in this meeting – this was Count Leonardo Bonzi, accompanied in his Breda 33 by Mr. Egidio Gavazzi.

The two Italian tourists gave excellent proof of their class, flying over the Alps at an altitude of over 4500 metres – that is, virtually at the aircraft's limit – on a day when the weather conditions were so prohibitive that when they took off at Bolzano they had to confirm their flight plan to... Verona.

Three hours of flying over a sea of clouds without the smallest break did not prevent the Breda 33 from arriving at Nuremberg, after the two pilots realised that Munich was completely covered over and therefore decided to continue.»



19 7 1907 — 23 2 1987

### Dr. Egidio Gavazzi

A sure guide you were  
And a magnificent example  
The memory of your loyalty,  
Strength, kindness and beauty  
will help us love the life that remains  
and keeps us apart.

He went to live in the old Gavazzi estate in Bellano (the house still existed), as it was closer to Switzerland, a safe haven in case of emergency. In Desio, in fact, he did not feel safe; he was too conspicuous, too close to Milan, which was being bombed, and therefore Desio was also at risk, too far from the border, etc.

Again from the diary of Franco, 1943: «Egidio and Ippolita, after having aired I don't know how many ideas about where to stay during the winter, continually plagued by doubts and forever under the weight of an almost morbid pessimism, have now decided in favour of Bellano, where Amalia will also spend the winter. I do not know what to say about it; it is difficult, almost impossible, to express one's opinion (which is, in any case, rarely asked) about this delicate and crucial matter. According to me, Egidio's fears, which also take their toll on his health, are not entirely justified.» And again: «I myself shy away from having long conversations with Egidio, who is even more pessimistic and catastrophic than me in his predictions.»

After the war, in the late 1940s, he fled to Brazil in fear of Communism, a fear that had previously prompted him to change his mother's maiden name on his identity card from Pirelli to Tirelli.

When the threat of Communism subsided a little, he returned to Italy, after many years of self-imposed «exile» in Brazil, and settled in Piazza Fiume, Milan (now Piazza della Repubblica).

He was fond of travelling, frequented fashionable places and had wealthy friends. He had a house in Celerina, in Barbados in the Caribbean, and a beautiful villa in Laveno, on Lake Maggiore, which was restored by Gigi Caccia.

Egidio died in Saint Moritz, Switzerland, on February 23, 1987.



Rodolfo Gavazzi.

### RODOLFO GAVAZZI (1908-1995)

He was born in Desio on September 26, 1908. After graduating in chemistry, Rodolfo began to work with his father at the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company, of which he later became Chairman and Managing Director.

He was also Chairman of IAC (Chemical Applications Industry) and of the Zucchi Clinics, and Board member of the following companies: Bemberg, Milan Insurance, the Cassa Lombarda, the Bank of Desio, Paradiso and the Targetti Wool Manufacturers.

He was also nominated Grand Officer of the Crown of Italy.

He set up a modern farm in Verderio Superiore, of which he was very proud, and had managerial responsibilities in the Farmers' Union of Como.

In 1930 he married Pia Gneccchi Ruscone (b. 21.08.1911).

On May 23, 1938, he obtained a pilot's license in Vicenza, an initiative he kept secret from the whole family except for Franco Gavazzi, who, after talking with his brother one day, commented in his diary: «It is a joy to find someone with whom I can speak about so many

important things in total confidence and freedom, in the knowledge that my opinion, my way of feeling, my way of thinking, are taken in due consideration and shared by a person who is intelligent and understanding, and not systematically contrary and negative, as is the rule in Via Brera.»

### *The Rossi Wool Manufacturing Co.*

After the death of his mother, while he was still young, Rodolfo was moved into his father's bedroom, where he continued to sleep until he married.

He was his father's favourite in the Rossi Company as well. He began to work in Schio; subsequently, after conflicts with his father (for reasons unknown) he resigned, unwisely announcing his decision suddenly in the Board meeting before telling his father, and went to work for the SNIA company.

This is what Franco wrote in his diary about the episode in April 1939: «The family is presently living the nightmare of the latest sensational news: Rodolfo is leaving the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company to go work at SNIA. This came as a great shock to Father, who was not at all prepared. I must say that, although Rodolfo had repeatedly hinted at the possibility to me, I would never have expected him to make such a serious decision without first informing Father and myself. This is what I regret the most, more than the fact itself, which is, unfortunately, justifiable from several standpoints. First of all, Pia never managed to settle down in Schio and always claimed that it was a temporary situation; in addition to this, there was probably the influence of Anita Gnechi, which, inter nos, is surely not to be taken lightly, and, in the background, there is the much-unloved environment of the Via Brera household, which was created especially for dampening all enthusiasm, throwing spanners in the works, being a pain in the neck and «castrating» (spiritually speaking, of course) even the toughest and most steadfast. In any case, what is done is done, and it does not help to blame or accuse anyone, rightly or wrongly – and who knows but that this painful incident might bring about an improvement in the organisation of the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company, because the field now lies open to the solution that many have voted for, including myself, and that should consist in finding a capable and clever person to take on the job of competently and efficiently managing that ponderous and prominent industrial organism. I heard the news this morning from Egidio, when I arrived in Milan, and I must confess I was dumbfounded. After I left Egidio I went to see Father, who, poor man, was in very low spirits. I tried to console him, and was unusually meek and cautious during the conversation – so much so that I did not even mention the gossips in Via Brera!»

Again from the diary of Franco, March 1941: «Rodolfo, who has always been what one would call a clever chap, has won a scholarship at the SNIA for having learned German, and has been awarded a month's holiday in Germany at the company's expense. He will go from mid-July to mid-August, after which, in full agreement with Marinotti, he will resume his original post at the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company. I have advocated this from the

beginning, that is, ever since the unbearable situation and the questionable alliances formed within the context of our family forced him to leave his natural job, which is that of continuing and integrating Father's business.»

After the death of his father, Rodolfo took over his position as Chairman of the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company.

March 1953 saw the formal inauguration of the new company offices of Via G.B. Pirelli no. 12, which was attended by Minister Pella, the Cardinal, and other prominent figures.

Eventually, however, the company began to fall into difficulties. It appears that certain megalomaniacal tendencies caused him to over-spend, and that he had assigned himself an exaggerated salary.

The situation was extremely serious. Then, in order to hold on to the majority, Rodolfo bought shares with the company's money (perhaps from extra-budget reserves). Being an honest man, he put this money in a safe-deposit box, specifying that it belonged to the Company – a move that was later to turn against him.

Little is known about the episode, but in 1957 Rodolfo was dismissed from the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company. From Franco's diary, June 28, 1957: «There is something that is particularly bitter and distressing to me, and that is that Rodolfo now finds himself virtually obliged to resign as Chief Executive Officer of the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company, and this for having made some serious mistakes in the period of that scoundrel Frasio and certainly instigated by him. It is truly the end of a legend, because in our family honesty in business has always been proverbial.»

And again on February 20, 1958: «Yet sadder, or rather more worrying, are the rumours that are spreading with regard to Rodolfo's management of the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company. I have tried to have him explain to me directly, in agreement also with cousins Egidio and Pietro and with his friend and consultant Mr. Pellegatta, but I came up against a brick wall. God protect and help us *a negotio perambulante in tenebris*.»

April 24, 1958: «Rodolfo, Piera and Giovanna came for lunch. Rodolfo read to us several passages of a memorial drawn up by his defense attorneys. It appears that the real responsibilities for the sad affair that has shaken the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company are altogether different from those that are being shoved onto Rodolfo, and it seems that it would be very convenient for a number of people to put the blame on him – which, in fact, I have never doubted.»

For a period of time Rodolfo's place in the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company was taken by lawyer and former judge Luigi Lado Manca, the husband of Maria Piera (Pea) Gavazzi and Rodolfo's uncle. Later, however, in 1957, the important Gavazzi shares were sold separately to a Sicilian financier of dubious origin, named Virgillito.

Rodolfo continued to work with the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company until 1962, when the company, which by this time was suffering a slump, joined the ENI Group.

The Rossi company affair also created friction between the Gavazzi and Castellini families, who were also shareholders.

In 1951 Rodolfo's brother Franco, in order to purchase the house at n. 17 Viale San Michele del Carso, Milan, decided to sell his shares in the Rossi Wool Manufacturing Company and informed Rodolfo. When he did not receive a reply, he went ahead and sold the shares anyway, regardless of the fact that a union agreement forbade the move. The family was furious; Franco was no longer trusted in his position as Chairman of the Zucchi Clinics, and consequently was forced to resign. He was replaced by his brother-in-law, Uberto Dell'Orto. After this episode Rodolfo set up the Boschi farm, of which he was proud, and so entered the world of farming.

He was for a long period of time Board member and in later years Honorary Chairman in the Bemberg company.

Subsequently, in 1977, he took Franco's place as Chairman of the Zucchi Clinics, a position he held until 1995. He later became Honorary Chairman.

### *The death of Rodolfo*

In December 1966 Rodolfo was operated for a tumour of the vocal cords. In his last years he completely lost his voice. He died in Milan, in his house in Corso di Porta Romana, on December 11, 1995 and was buried in Verderio. Until the end of his life, in fact, he remained very close to the Gniecchi family.

## **PIETRO GAVAZZI (1913-1983)**

Born in Desio on July 18, 1913, Pietro graduated in electronic engineering in 1936. He was later a reserve officer in the Corps of Engineers.

On May 9, 1938 he married his cousin Maria Luisa Lado (b. 13.8.1915), of Sardinian origin (Sassari), in the church of Sant'Ambrogio, Milan; the wedding ceremony was performed by his brother, Don Egidio, who had by this time been a monk for several years. Pietro and Maria Luisa lived in Via De Amicis, Milan.

During the war, he spent two winters on the Russian Front (1941-42 and 1942-43). Miraculously, he managed to avoid the ill-fated retreat.

As soon as he found out he was going to be sent to Russia, he set about with great eagerness and determination to learn Russian, and he learned it so well that he was appointed as the official interpreter of his command. He was a strong-minded and talented man.

After the liberation he became Senior Town Councillor of Desio for the department of «roads, lighting and public utilities.»

He was a great mountain-climber, especially on granite, and cross-country skier.

He was President of the Desio branch of the CAI (Italian Alpinists' Club) immediately after the war. In 1996 the CAI named an Alpine refuge in the Aosta Valley after him.

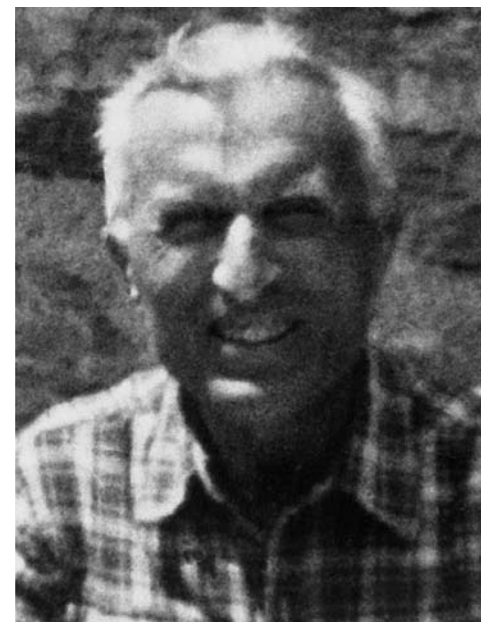
He was also a keen militant of the FUCI (Association of Italian Catholic University Students).



Here in the family chapel  
let us always remember

### Rodolfo Gavazzi

husband of Pia Gniecchi Ruscone  
and buried at Verderio S.  
b. in Desio on 26-9-1908  
d. in Milan on 11-12-1995.



Pietro Gavazzi  
(1913-1983).

*Egidio & Pio Gavazzi*

Pietro joined the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi weaving business of Desio in 1937 as his uncle Simone's assistant.

His cousin Franco, who had already been working there for some years, made the following entry in his diary regarding Pietro's arrival: «This has really been a very good move. He is a boy of outstanding intelligence, and has, therefore, what it takes to get on with those around him. The education he has received and the environment in which he grew up are a sure guarantee of his seriousness of character. Moreover, as far as I am concerned, having him nearby greatly puts my mind at ease. He will one day become the cornerstone of the company. Those of the same generation understand each other better than those of different generations. Some say that each generation is separated from the last by a great gulf – this may be an exaggeration, but the concept is basically true. In our family, indeed, there is a remarkable understanding between first cousins, whereas in the generation before us it was a very different story.

Perhaps this was caused by jealousy among the mothers – Granny Peppina and Aunt Ninetta<sup>28</sup>, her sister-in-law, politely detested each other; perhaps they were too alike in their mediocrity, because they were both good women (and Granny Peppina was really a very upright woman) but nothing more.»

In those years the company, which was almost 70 years old, manufactured silk and silk blend fabrics for lingerie and clothing, linings and umbrella fabric. During the war it also made parachute fabric in silk, while in the first years after the war the company manufactured mainly fabrics for linings (Bemberg) and umbrellas. In 1945 Pietro was appointed manager, in 1950 Board member and in 1953 Managing Director.

In 1956 the company ran into difficulties, and 80 employees had to be laid off. In 1965 «the glorious old Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company is crumbling under our feet.»

From Franco's diary, March 10th, 1965: «Board meeting at the company to discuss the question of Pietro's resignation as Managing Director. The unanimous decision was made (as we expected) not to accept it. In the meantime, Pietro will have to prepare a double programme, of streamlining and financing, and submit it to the Board, which will then make further decisions.»

March 24<sup>th</sup>: «Unfortunately, in the afternoon I also have the Board meeting at the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi, which is struggling in a catastrophic situation.»

March 26<sup>th</sup>: «An endless Board meeting at the home of Ettore Dell'Orto to try to find a way to halt the collapse of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company. After almost a century of activity, after so much glory, now it is all crumbling under our feet! In a few days we will meet again; but if in such a short time we will not have scraped together at least 350 million (which today is no joke) we will have no other alternative but to liquidate.»

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<sup>28</sup> Andreina Costa Kuliscioff, the daughter of Andrea Costa and Anna Kuliscioff who married Luigi Gavazzi (see Chapter 11).

April 6<sup>th</sup>: «We are continuing to try and launch, among infinite worries and great anxiety, the increase of capital of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company...»

April 8<sup>th</sup>: «An intense day. After the ‘triumph’ of the Nursing Home (extraordinary meeting, ordinary meeting, board meeting, big lunch for the shareholders), followed the tears, the sweat and the wounds of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company, exposed in the umpteenth board meeting.»

April 9<sup>th</sup>: «I think I have found the way to make possible the famous increase of capital of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi. Who will later have to pay back these debts – myself or my heirs – remains a mystery; if business does pick up, it could very well be me.»

April 12<sup>th</sup>: «The long «Calvary» of the financing of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi is not yet over, and who can say if we will ever make it through! Let us hope and, especially in this *tempus acceptabile*, pray.»

April 15<sup>th</sup>: «Yet another meeting today for the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company. Now that we have come to realise that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to finance the company «from within», we are tending towards resorting to a «third man», that is, «outside» financing. We are a little late in choosing this path, but it may be that we are finally on the right track.»

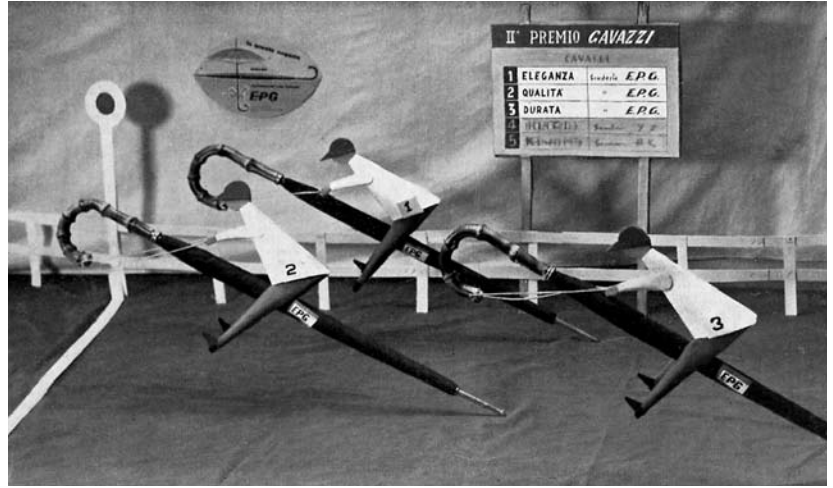
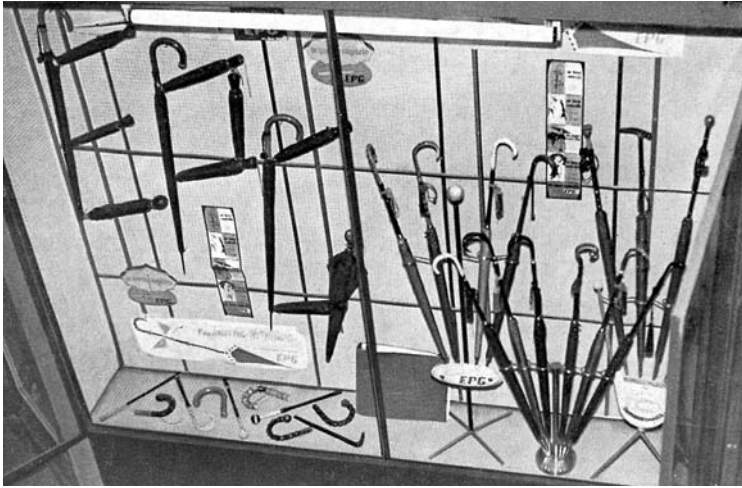
April 20<sup>th</sup>: «The SNIA operation is slowly taking form – is it too soon to say it is being put into action. On our side Stefano is acting as *trait d’union*; on the other side it is Max Paleari, who in the SNIA is considered the probable successor. In any case, the first overture is set for the day after tomorrow, in the evening – we (Ettore Dell’Orto, Pietro, Stefano and I) have been invited to lunch at the home of Max Paleari. «Chi vivrà vedrà» [«He who lives shall see»].»

April 21<sup>st</sup>: «In the afternoon was the umpteenth interminable company Board meeting, which prevented me from taking part in the *bridge* game that I had arranged to play in the guests’ quarters of the Club with the Malaspina sisters.»

April 22<sup>nd</sup>: «The overture (that perhaps we may say was a momentous event) has taken place, beginning with an excellent lunch at the home of Max Paleari. The highlight of the meal was a dish of quails (of which I regret having eaten only two). The thing, in short, appears to be well on its way – tomorrow we will request more details of a technical nature, after which we will await the decision of the Chairman (Marinotti), who, however, I believe has already been informed.»

May 24<sup>th</sup>: «Board meeting – ordinary and extraordinary – of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company. The atmosphere is a little electric, as it always is when things are not going well. Nevertheless, in spite of a few contrasts, all the items on the agenda have been approved. In place of Pio Gavazzi, who has resigned, his brother Giulio has been nominated Board member.»

June 3<sup>rd</sup>: «The great meeting with Marinotti has taken place – Ettore Dell’Orto, Pietro, Max Paleari and myself were also present. The affair is basically settled, and with it a great weight has been lifted from our shoulders.»



Four photos showing prize-winning displays of the Great Window Display Competition for umbrella shops, held by the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi Company in 1957 and offering a total of 2,000,000 lira in prizes.

July 21<sup>st</sup>: «A long Board meeting at the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company.»

September 8<sup>th</sup>: «With Ettore Dell'Orto in the afternoon at the Club to hear the latest developments of the «SNIA Operation», which is following its course and is expected to mature within a short time.»

December 18<sup>th</sup>: «Board meeting at the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi. The 'SNIA Conjunction' has fallen through (they continued to beat about the bush and play for time with the aim of 'starving us into submission') and, with the capital increase approved in full, Ettore Dell'Orto has resigned from his position as Chairman and will be replaced by Costanzo Mapelli, with Chicco Dubini as Vice-Chairman. Pietro will remain the Managing Director but has resigned as Manager and will be replaced by a General Director, who must come from the textile sector. Now let us hope we are on the right track.»

Again from the diary of Franco, February 12, 1966: «Board meeting this morning at the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company. We have decided to hire a commercial director, who, with

a little luck, should be the long-hoped-for *deus ex machina*. Present for the first time was new Board member Chicco Dubini.»

January 30, 1968: «I have resigned from the Board of Directors of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company, where, sadly, catastrophic developments seem to be inevitable. This is a very painful decision, but necessary, even though from now on I will not be able to keep a close eye on the large capital I have tied down in the company.»



February 7, 1968: «Egidio will take the position – vacated by my resignation – of Board member of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company. He will thus represent not only my own share, but also those of Rodolfo and my sisters – and I am sure his will be an active contribution, because he is not lacking either in intelligence or intuition; moreover, there is a great need for young blood in that old and narrow organism, which is now in its 99th year (*or in its dotage*).»

May 2, 1968: «In the afternoon there was a Board meeting of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company. It was recorded as a real disaster; however, I am still of the opinion that all is not lost. We must just hold on for one more year, and this should not be impossible; then we should be able to pick up again, on a scale reduced almost to artisan dimensions, but completely recovered.»

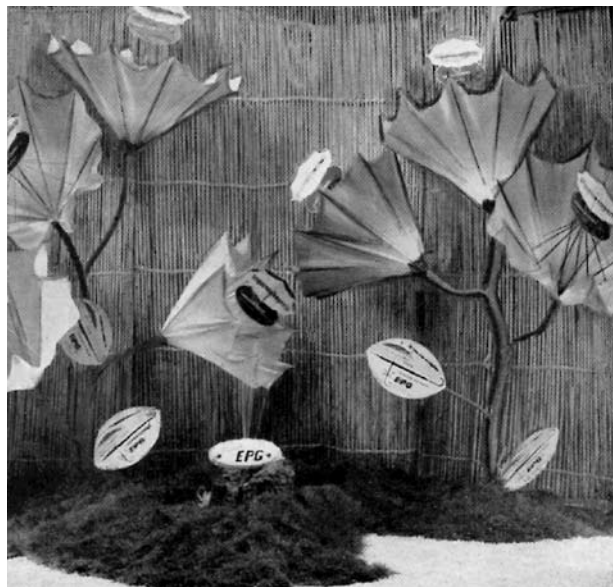
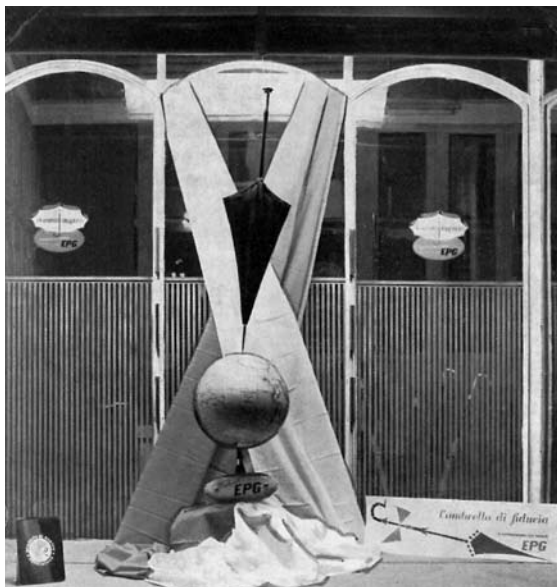
After the crisis of the 1960s, from 1967–69 the whole company complex underwent a major re-organisation. The administrative and commercial offices in Milan were closed, the building at n. 48 Corso Magenta was sold, and the entire management was moved to a small building inside the factory complex in Desio. The company began to specialise in the manufacture of umbrella fabrics, almost completely abandoning the other sectors (clothing, etc.).

The work force was cut with the introduction of new machinery; through agreements made with Autobianchi some of the laid-off workers were absorbed by Autobianchi itself.

Pietro suffered from pangs of conscience. Having inherited the family industry partly from his uncle Simone, he found himself torn between the demands of the factory budget and the well-being of the workers, which, as a Christian, he was unable to ignore.

The company was recapitalised, with the consequent cancellation of several of the time-honoured partners from the company structure.

In 1971, following the re-organisation of the company, Pietro also became Chairman, while maintaining his position as Managing Director.



Two more photos of prize-winning displays.

In the 1970s, despite the unfavourable economic situation, the newly-organised and re-capitalised company succeeded in reaching the break-even point and even made a small profit towards the end of the decade.

Also in the 1970s, following serious droughts in the autumn-winter of 1974-75 and 1975-76, feasibility studies were carried out to search for alternative products to the traditional umbrella fabrics. Thanks to the know-how it had acquired, the company was able to successfully launch on the Italian and European market a special fabric used to make shower curtains, which then replaced the traditional unhygienic plastic curtain.

The Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company was later closed down permanently by the Pietro's sons in 1992, after 123 years (and four generations) of uninterrupted activity.

In addition, for many years Pietro was a Board member and Vice Chairman of the Como-based Italian Silk Manufacturers' Association.

### *The Bank of Desio*

On May 2, 1943, Pietro was nominated Board member of the Bank of Desio and on April 4, 1959, Chairman, replacing Luigi Lado. He became a member of the Executive Committee on May 18, 1972, the same day it was established. In the spring of 1978, in declining health, he resigned as Chairman.

In 1950 the bank moved its offices to Piazza della Conciliazione in Desio.

On January 3, 1968 the Bank of Desio merged with the Bank of Brianza, changing its name to the Bank of Desio and Brianza. From the diary of Franco, November 14, 1966: «This afternoon, with a fair proportion of shareholders present, the extraordinary meeting of the Bank of Desio was held for the increase of capital from 300 to 500 million. The take-over of the Bank of Brianza, destined to merge with our bank, was also announced and caused a sensation.»

In the early 1980s plans were made for the construction of the new building in Via Rovagnati, which was inaugurated a few years after his death.

In 1953 the bank had 4 branches and a total of 35 employees, and deposits amounting to 2.4 billion lira. By December 31, 1982 it boasted 28 branches, 527 employees and deposits totalling 306 billion lira.

As Chairman of the bank, Pietro was awarded honorary citizenship of Moruzzo (Udine), after the bank donated the sum of 20 million lira for reconstruction projects following the famous earthquake in the region at the end of the 1970s.

### *A profile of Pietro*

From a comment by his cousin Franco, January 27, 1944: «My very dear cousins, Pietro and Maria Luisa, came to have tea and keep us company – they are really a fine couple, perhaps the best of our generation. That is not to say that Maria Luisa is worth more than Margherita, because Margherita to me is a priceless treasure, but Pietro is so superior to me in all ways

that the mere «moral weight» of him would tip the imaginary scales holding our two respective couples decidedly in their favour.»

### VITTORIA BENEDEUCE GAVAZZI (1914-1987)

She was born on September 1, 1914. Vittoria was a lively, extremely witty and beautiful woman.

Her uncle, Vittorio Alfieri (General, Senator and Minister of War in 1917 and 1918), who was the husband of one of her grandmother's sisters on the Biella side and already had numerous great-nephews and great-nieces on the way, after attempting to shirk the responsibility of being made a godfather, announced to his sister-in-law: «Giuseppina, I will be the godfather of the sixth child to be born in the families of your children... but in everything there is a «Vittoria!»» (as well as Vittoria Gavazzi there was also a Vittoria Chierichetti).

Like her brothers and sisters, Vittoria always used to claim (perhaps with a note of sadness) that she had four parents (Giuseppe, Aunt Mamà, Felice and Simone).

#### *The marriage with Ernesto Beneduce*

She fell in love with Ernesto Beneduce (5.7.1914 - 17.12.1972), the son of Professor and Senator Alberto Beneduce, the famous financier who created the IRI (Institute for Industrial Reconstruction), of which he was Chairman between the two wars.

Ernesto was an extremely intelligent man, although he had the appearance of a typical boorish Southerner (or so it was said in the Gavazzi family).

His father Alberto (b. in Caserta in 1877, d. in Rome in 1944) was a Social-Reformist M.P. and was appointed Minister of Labour and Social Security from 1921 to 1922; he was also a Professor of economics and statistics.

One of the founders of the National Insurance Institute and the National Servicemen's Institute, he was appointed Italian representative at the conferences of London and Brussels.

It is said that he was the only person allowed to enter Mussolini's room without being kept waiting.

He was part of the enlightened middle-class, and shared with the Duce only the latter's earlier years in Socialism. In honour of such ideals, in fact, Alberto did not consider it excessive to call his three daughters Idea Nuova Socialista, Vittoria Proletaria and Italia Libera (respectively New Socialist Idea, Victory of the Proletariat and Free Italy). Italia, Ernesto's sister, later married Remigio Paone, a famous theatrical impresario and theatre owner, while Idea married Enrico Cuccia, the enigmatic and famous financier of Mediobanca. It was in Alberto's own living room that Cuccia (then in his late twenties), having been transferred to the IRI to complete the training he began with the Bank of Italy, first met his future wife.

A friend of intellectuals who had little in common with the «Regime», Beneduce customarily held a salon every Sunday for afternoon tea.



Vittoria Gavazzi in Beneduce.

The Gavazzi and Beneduce families were quite different – the Gavazzis, in fact, were extremely religious, while the Beneduces were anti-religious, atheists and not even baptised, and they gave such names to their children.

Giuseppe, Vittoria's father, was not in favour of the union; Aunt Mamà was, however, because of the importance of Vittoria's future father-in-law, and greatly encouraged the young couple.

Eventually Ernesto was baptised, took communion, was confirmed and married: all on the same day, or nearly so.

Franco Gavazzi, quoting the classic novel *The Betrothed*, commented: «Converted, you are converted, then? A great conversion! And you persist, do you not? You persist.»

He received princely gifts, such as, for example, a cup with pedestal in quartz crystal, by Ravasco, decorated with platinum and sapphires, from the Southern Railways. «There is at least one advantage to marrying into... high finance», Franco wrote. At the wedding reception in Via Brera the couple received an astounding number of floral bouquets, over 200 in all, which began at the main staircase and formed a continuous procession through the entire apartment: an explosion of colours and scents.

Ernesto and Vittoria married on February 21, 1938, after a six-month courtship, in an informal and evocative ceremony in the chapel of the Canossian nuns in Corso Garibaldi. The wedding was officiated by Vittoria's cousin, Don Egidio, and was attended only by members of the two families.

Franco wrote on this occasion: «And so the last of us six has also taken flight! I recall the first worrying years of Vittoria's childhood, so fragile she was, and surrounded by so much care! And today here she is, a married woman, and perhaps soon to become a mother. May Heaven grant her all the happiness I wish her with all my heart and that she deserves for her profound faith, despite the fact that the family environment has not been the most suitable for forming and nurturing her many good habits and cultivating in her a sound common sense, so necessary in life.»

Theirs was a marriage of love 'til «death do part», which, sadly, came to pass all too soon.

### *The homes of Ernesto and Vittoria*

Ernesto found work and lived first in Paris, then in Rome, etc. In May 1939 he was employed by the Montecatini company and so finally, after a long series of moves, they settled down in Via Fatebenefratelli, Milan.

At the end of 1940, with the onset of the war, he was called to arms and posted to Greece. In December 1942 he was serving in Centocelle; Vittoria moved to Rome. In 1943 he was sent to Corsica (in 1944 Vittoria was still living in Rome).

Later he returned to his post in the Montecatini company's Milan offices and, due to the bombings, sent his family to live in Desio. In 1946 the family lived in Inzago as tenants of the Gnechi family. One year later they moved to Via Turati, in Milan.

The Beneduce family owned a nice house on the Ligurian coast, in Santa Margherita. When Aunt Mamà died, Vittoria inherited a part of the villa in Parravicino, which she later sold to the Lado family as she was not fond of the place.

### *A profile of Vittoria*

Vittoria was a very warm-hearted and likeable woman. From the diary of her brother Franco: «I went with Margherita for dinner at the home of Vittoria and Ernesto. We had a very pleasant evening. I must say I have changed my mind about the apartment, which now I like more and more – it is arranged with good taste and with beautiful and valuable furniture. Vittoria receives her guests with perfect *aisance*, in which she is above her sisters, as Piera is always a little «self-conscious» [the author uses the English term] among her guests, while Giuseppina is always on tenterhooks. Regarding Giovanna I couldn't say, as due to the circumstances she is the one I am least in contact with.»

Vittoria died on February 14, 1987.

### **PIO GAVAZZI (1922-1994)**

Pio was born on March 29, 1922. He was an engineer, and was considered a great gentleman. During the war he worked in the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi in Desio. In the same period, his cousins Egidio Dell'Orto and Ignazio Lado were also employed in the company. In order to avoid being drafted, in fact, one had to have an important position in an industry.

In 1944 the elder cousins of the company (Franco and Pietro) used to call the three young trainee cousins in the factory the «small fry». In 1946 another cousin, Piero DalVerme, joined the ranks of the «small fry».

Pio became a Board member of the Egidio & Pio Gavazzi company and held the position until May 1965, when he resigned, giving up his place to his brother Giulio. He went on to become a manager in a large company (not family-owned).

He married Sabina Nizzola, a very pretty girl from the Canton Ticino, in Switzerland. The wedding was held in Lugano, in the little church of Loreto.

From the diary of Franco Gavazzi: «Great elegance, beautiful ladies in lovely «toilettes», with their respective mothers and grandmothers in gowns. Father Genesio, who is practically one of the family, held an early Mass and gave Communion to the newlyweds.»

«We had the consolation of seeing our dear exiled Princes of Pistoja and Bergamo, on the day before they returned to their Homeland for a special 10-day permit granted by the infamous Republican government.»

Pio lived in a fine apartment at Via Donizetti no. 53, Milan. He died on August 17, 1994.

## XIV GENERATION

The XIV generation is that to which I myself belong. It is natural, therefore, that I should not relate the biographies of those who are so close in time and to whom I would do injustice by unavoidably failing to list each and every one of their merits and successes. I will, however, make an exception for Vico Gavazzi, since, although the family tree places him in my own generation, according to the birth registers he actually belonged to that of my father. Above all, however, I mention him because, in my opinion, he did a great deal more than many others to preserve the characteristics of the family and its industrious and entrepreneurial nature, extending as he did to another continent businesses and initiatives that for centuries have been part and parcel of the Gavazzi chromosomes.

### LODOVICO (VICO) GAVAZZI (1913-1996)

Lodovico was born on March 26, 1913. On March 15, 1939, in Desio, he married his cousin Amalia Gavazzi (b. 23.6.1918), a pleasant and likeable woman.

In 1940 he was called up, and served in the Cavalry. After the war, in 1946, his name appeared in the so-called «independent list» for the elections, which included all the Right Wing parties.

Lodovico, or Vico, was described by Franco as a «superior young man, a concentrate of sound common sense, refined culture and sense of fairness and justice.»

He worked at the Pietro Gavazzi textiles industry, which belonged to his family. During the war, as a result of the air raids in Milan, the offices of his company were evacuated to Valmadrera and Vico, who at the time lived in Desio, moved (with great reluctance) with Amalia to Bellano. In those days, however, it took three hours to travel from Desio to Valmadrera, whereas from Bellano it was not as difficult.

They were always happy to visit Desio, where Vico's mother-in-law, Rosa Pirelli, often went.

His father Pio, uncle Emanuele and cousin Alessandro (Emanuele's son) also worked at the Pietro Gavazzi company; the shares were divided in equal parts between his father and his uncle.

Lodovico felt that the company did not offer him much scope, and perhaps he did not get on very well with Alessandro, who, although younger than him, had more responsibility. In addition to this, his father Pio, who had hinted at his own gradual withdrawal from the business, re-married for the third time and decided to hold onto the reins of the company.

Consequently, Lodovico made the decision to leave not only the company where he worked, but Italy itself. In 1947, therefore, he moved to Brazil with his family, and there he remained. In the post-war period, in actual fact, many people were very afraid of Communism taking over in the country, and Lodovico was one of them.

The Pietro Gavazzi company did not continue on for much longer. It was closed down after suffering a succession of considerable losses.

His brother-in-law (Egidio Gavazzi) and cousin (Alfredo Chierichetti) also emigrated to Brazil more or less at the same time, and they formed a community of relatives in Sao Paulo.

Vico set up a nylon twisting plant and stocking factory, which was fairly successful, even though he had originally installed old machinery from a Dubini factory.

Subsequently, he founded another industrial activity in the field of electronics, which was also successful. He was also called by Pirelli to become the chairman and representative of the company for all of South America. His responsibilities were not operational, but rather of a public relations nature, and every morning he was flown by helicopter to his office at Pirelli.

Throughout the rest of his life he greatly missed his homeland. He died in Sao Paulo on January 3, 1996.



Lodovico Gavazzi  
(1913-1996).

**ALESSANDRO GAVAZZI (1922-1961)**

Alessandro was born on August 23, 1922. Also known as Sandro, in 1953 he married Gabriella (b. 1932) from the Corradi Cervi family of marquises, at Collecchiello di Parma. Alessandro also worked in the Pietro Gavazzi company, which was owned in equal shares by his father Emanuele and his uncle Pio. His cousin Lodovico (Pio's son) also worked in the company until after the war, when he emigrated to Brazil. Unfortunately, after around 150 years in business the company was no longer competitive and was forced to close down, after suffering heavy losses.

After the war Alessandro bought the house at n. 3 Via Goito, in Milan, where in the entrance hall today there is a marble bust of Giuseppe Antonio Gavazzi (1768-1835).

Alessandro died tragically on March 1, 1961, in a skiing accident at Cortina d'Ampezzo. The funeral, which was held two days later, was attended by a huge crowd of mourners, both friends and common folk. He was greatly lamented.