

NOTE: This Article takes about 20 minutes to read – and as it is a closely reasoned presentation, may I suggest that you do not start reading it unless you can finish it in one sitting. Merci bien!

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## **A CHAIN OF LINKS**

by Father Justin,  
FALKLAND.

1969.

From whichever end of the chain I start my story, it would, I am sure, prove equally fascinating. It could also be called "A Bunch of Dates" because I have endeavoured to give a date as far as possible to each of the links in my chain-of-events and somewhat bizarre coincidences, for I can truly claim that, in this instance at least, truth is stranger than any fiction. However, in order to comply with the usual procedure of historians – amateur and otherwise – I suggest we take up the first link in the first year of this turbulent twentieth century, namely, Anno Domini 1900. Some of the younger readers in the Dawson Family will, please God, live to usher in the next century in the year 2000 A.D. It will then be not without interest for them to look back over a hundred years and to piece together some links of their own in the story of this numerous and far-flung Family to which they belong.

In the year 1900 then, Queen Victoria was still on the throne of England, Great Britain & Ireland, India, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, parts of Africa and innumerable other parcels of territory which made up the greatest Empire the world had ever known – or will ever know. She was to die the following year and be spared the sight of the first cracks in the Imperial Fabric which would lead eventually to the great "Break-up". (Incidentally, the B.B.C. has just decided to make a 13-part colour T.V. History of what could well be called "The Decline and Fall of the British Empire and Commonwealth" since the turn of the century. I am, so to speak, getting my oar in first.) At this time, of 1900, our particular branch of the family resided in the pleasant Essex village of Woodford Green (later to glory in its political association with the immortal Winston Churchill). My father, William Dawson, was glad enough to undertake the long daily journey into the Big City (of London) in order to enjoy over the week-ends the beauties of Epping Forest which he loved so much and which we all in turn learned to appreciate. His eldest son, William Edward, was then ten years old; Jim about eight; Ray about seven; Adrian about five; Bass about three; Isabel about two; and Flip was the baby, born in 1900.

Veronica, I Norman (later given the name in religion of Justin), Anita and Vincent were still to come – in that order. The parish church was a friary staffed by the French Province of the Franciscans, for this was the end of the period when many religious communities left France and sought refuge in England, to the great advantage of the Catholic Church in that hospitable and largely Protestant country. (Other such examples were to be found at Douai, Downside, Ampleforth and Buckfast.) The Woodford Friary was founded by a certain Dowager Duchess of

Newcastle who lived beside it, with a private door leading from her house straight into the choir gallery. (Her house and property subsequently became a convent for the Poor Clares.) The fact that the Friary at Woodford was part of the French Province in England – which was to be taken over by the English Province after a few years and which would eventually have one of my own class-mates Fr. John Lavery, OFM. as its Provincial – may have some bearing on a question I have often asked myself. Why, from eight boys in a good church-going family, they had to wait for me before there was a priest in the family. The answer would appear to be that although both Ed and Jim spent a few years in the Junior Seminary of the French Province at Clevedon in Somerset, their Dad did not relish the idea of them becoming involved in the very disturbed situation in France at the time. In due course, I believe that Ray also showed some inclination towards a vocation, but again Dad was not keen. He had been received into the Church after meeting our mother and, being a business-man by profession, he was more inclined to consider those things from a practical, rather than a spiritual point of view. To him, at the time, it seemed that our parish-priest's vocation mainly consisted of trying to drum money out of the Faithful in order to reduce the crippling church debt under which he laboured; and this did not seem to be a particularly spiritual activity. So, apart from Adrian spending a short time as a lay-brother at Fort Augustus Abbey, it remained for me, after two attempts, to reach the priesthood. End of question.

Return now to our Dowager Duchess. If I suggest that she is also the first link in our chain, the private door from her house to her little niche in the choir-loft is the second link. She was a very great lover of music, not only in the appreciative sense, but also in the practical, in so far as she loved to sing with the other ladies and gentlemen of the choir. These were the days of choral masses by Mozart and Mendelssohn and as our mother was the principal soprano and the Duchess had a rich contralto voice, we forge the third link which brought the two of them together. Indeed, she was so enthusiastic that she would often have mother up to the big house, sending her carriage and pair when necessary, to practise duets together, even if this meant taking along the latest baby in her arms. Perhaps this explains why we Dawsons are such a "musical family", as most of us had a turn at being in, if not of, the choir on a Sunday morning – with possibly a surreptitious "feed" at times during the sermon! If you ask me how the mother of a large and ever-growing family managed to be a full-time choir member and active church-worker, I can only say that she was one of those rare – and fast disappearing – people who, the busier they are, the more they find time to do. While mother was busy at one end of the church in the choir-loft, complete with baby, the older boys of the family were busy serving on the sanctuary at the other end. Needless to say, they were the special pets of the Duchess, for all the Dawson boys were, of course, quite angelic as children – however deviously they developed in their later years! So one of Jim's happy memories – which he has only quite recently divulged – is that of being in the London Hospital for a time and actually having a visit from the Duchess. She drove up in grand style, complete with liveried coachmen, and it may well have been a coach-and-four owing to the considerable distance she would have to travel. So impressive was her arrival that the hospital staff thought it was Queen Victoria herself – which is more or less where we came in!

Returning now to the "musical family" theme: we find that, by the same year of 1900 AD, Edward, who received his First Holy Communion on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August that year, had graduated from being an altar-boy to being a choir-boy and it is quite certain that in the musical repertoire of the period there were many opportunities for the services of a boy-soprano. That this training had a lasting and beneficial effect is witnessed by the extraordinary fact that some seventy years later Edward is still able and willing to assist the slender choral resources of his parish church in Bermuda with his well-preserved tenor voice. We were all musical, either instrumentally or vocally, to a varying degree and in due course I inherited the family tradition and, apart from light opera and a spell in the magnificent choir of St. Patrick's in Montreal, the peak of my vocal activity was in the Schola Cantorum of the monks' choir at Buckfast Abbey. And now the tradition is being carried on by the present younger generation as so many of them are musical and as well as playing the piano they are learning the organ and a big variety of musical instruments, including the glockenspiel, which is played in one of the church choirs where the choir master is very 'with it' as they say today, and his choir, as well as making two records to date, has also appeared on the B.B.C. As well as being in church choirs, some of the youngsters are also in amateur operatic societies, so we can reasonably affirm that the end-product – to-date – of our musical Duchess's artistic encouragement of the Dawson Family is by no means negligible.

Another "Grande Dame" of the 1900's was Madame Van Zeller (of the famous port-wine family) who was a neighbour and friend of the Dowager Duchess. She herself is not a link in the chain I am slowly uncoiling – I mention her in passing because she was the Great-Aunt of Dom Hubert Van Zeller, O.S.B., of Downside, who was the spiritual adviser who ultimately set me on the road to the priesthood, from a layman's retreat which I made with Vincent in the 1930's.

Meanwhile, in this same great year of 1900, many miles to the north, in Scotland in fact, there died one of the great pillars of the Catholic revival in Great Britain which had surged forward with such impetus under the influence of Cardinal Newman's Second Spring. This was John Patrick Crichton Stuart, the third Marquess of Bute, the most notable convert to the faith of his fore-fathers at this period. We shall return to him – or rather his grandson – in due course.

A giant stride into the 20<sup>th</sup> century brings us now to the year 1938 when the memories of World War One were receding under the imminent threats of World War Two; and the wheels of a hard and uncomfortable pilgrimage-train hasten across Europe to the last pre-war Eucharistic Congress at Budapest. Mother and Anita were on that train and in the hostel where they were accommodated they made friends with a priest from Wales, Father Ivor Daniel. Six years later Fr. Daniel was back on the Continent, this time as a chaplain with the British Forces on their slow and laborious advance northwards in Italy. Shortly before this, Fr. Daniel had received into the Church a young naval officer called Frank Pogson who hailed from Bristol and the coincidence of their both coming from the West Country helped to develop their "spiritual relationship" into a firmly established permanent friendship.

Sub-Lieutenant Pogson was also in Italy during the war and from his mine-sweeper in 1944 he visited the devastated city of Ancona. While on shore-leave he took the opportunity of going to Mass, as a good Catholic sailor should, and afterwards on the steps of the church he met a young lady who seemed obviously English. The informality of war-time conditions dispensed with the necessity of an introduction, which he certainly would have required had he known that the young lady in question was Princess Orietta Doria Pamphili, from one of the oldest and most distinguished aristocratic families of Italy. She happened to be in Ancona helping to run a canteen of the Catholic Women's League (an English organisation) of the Allied Forces. (Isabel and Anita were doing the same thing near Westminster Cathedral.) Their casual acquaintance developed into a warm friendship and eventually a happy ending – but not before a few more links in our chain are forged by the hard realities of war and the conditions in post-war Europe.

Frank was only partly wrong in thinking that Princess Orietta was English, for her mother was the daughter of a Scottish doctor. While he was a student at Cambridge her father, Prince Filippo Doria, was involved in a sculling accident and the doctor's daughter not only nursed him back to health but also captured his heart and in due course became the Principessa Doria Pamphili. This is not the only Anglo-link in the Doria family tree. Their line goes way back into the Middle Ages and in the sixteenth century Admiral Andrea Doria was one of the most powerful men in Europe. In the art gallery of the Palazzo Doria (the most valuable private collection in Italy) there is a canvas of Admiral Andrea Doria sharing the frame with none other than Christopher Columbus. Today the revered name of Andrew Doria is reserved for the flagship of the Italian Navy, while the head of the Doria family, apart from two dukedoms and half-a-dozen marquises, inherits the ancient title of Prince of the Holy Roman Empire. Since Italy is now a Republic, such ranks have no official status, but they carry undiminished social prestige and domestic loyalty – which were ultimately to save the very lives of the Princess and her parents. (Incidentally it is rather intriguing to recall that I personally was once presented in Jerusalem, and shook hands with, Prince Umberto, who was to become the last King of Italy.)

To return to the magnificent art gallery of the Palazzo Doria – among its priceless treasures is a marble bust of a beautiful young woman, Orietta's grandmother, who was a daughter of the Duke of Newcastle. And so we come to Orietta's great-grandmother, the Duchess of Newcastle, who was Lady Mary Talbot, daughter of the Earl of Shrewsbury. Thus we have three generations of Doria Princes choosing their brides from England (in a descending order of nobility) until the last surviving member of the Doria family, Princess Orietta herself, chooses to marry an English commoner, Frank Pogson. But we have anticipated somewhat. It is my guess that Orietta's great-grandmother was our well-beloved Dowager Duchess of Newcastle who in her widowhood retired to Woodford Green. I have before me – quite literally, because it is over four inches thick – a copy of "Debrett's Peerage, Baronage, Knightage and Companionage", and if you have ever tried to thread your way through the branches of a family tree of the nobility, you will know where we get the saying of not being able to see the wood for the trees. In any

case, my Debrett is an old one of 1940, but not old enough to give me positive proof of particular identities in the 1900's. However, we know for a fact that "our" Duchess was definitely "musical", and I have a very recent personal message from Princess Orietta that there was a musical Duchess in her family.

The rise of Mussolini, the fall of the Italian monarchy and the Second World War, with Italy against Britain, was a grievous personal tragedy to a man like Orietta's father with all his Anglo-relations. He was, moreover, one of the few Italian aristocrats who had the courage to oppose Mussolini. He even appealed to King Umberto to withstand Mussolini and avoid war with Britain. Mussolini read this letter and so, when Italy went to war, Prince Filippo Doria went to a concentration-camp. On the fall of Mussolini in 1943, he returned to Rome, only to run foul of the Germans with their Gestapo on the rampage looking for hostages, with the name Prince high on their list. Only the sheer size of the Palazzo Doria – with its reputedly 1,000 rooms – and the unperturbable courage of the Prince himself, prevented his capture. The loyalty of his own "retainers" enabled him to go "underground" in one of the tough working-class districts of Rome, the Trastevere. Orietta dyed her fair Saxon hair black and with her mother also went into hiding to avoid being taken hostage. The stark horror of the situation they were in can be measured by the fate of the King's own daughter, Princess Mafalda, who was arrested and died in the notorious concentration-camp of Buchenwald. Eventually the Allies occupied Rome and General Mark Clark appointed Prince Filippo as Mayor of the Eternal City. Orietta joined the Catholic Women's League, as we have seen, and went to help in the canteen at Ancona where she was to meet Frank. Her mother returned to the Palazzo Doria to clear up the shocking mess left by the Germans. She died in 1955 and Orietta devoted the next three years to caring for her ailing father, who died in 1958 and left her the sole heiress to the ancient titles and vast properties of the Doria Pamphilis.

Meanwhile Frank Pogson had signed for another two years in the Royal Navy he loved so much, after which he joined the Shell-Mex organisation and went to the Argentine, only to be recalled for another two years' service during the Korean war. Then back to Shell in London. He kept in touch with Orietta and they met in London or Rome whenever possible. But their ultimate union seemed, to say the least, somewhat problematical.

Now let us join together some of the links in our chain. The time is the middle fifties. The place, London, where our youngest sister, Anita, is working her way steadily up the secretarial ladder, with Shell-Mex, but in their Finsbury Circus building. In the fortuitous course of business, she makes the acquaintance of Frank Pogson. Besides both being Catholics – a circumstance by no means necessarily in evidence between business associates – they find they have a mutual friend in Father Daniel who always contacted Frank when in London. In due course a little luncheon party is arranged and they were all able to talk over old times together. Then in 1958, fourteen years after they first met, Frank and Orietta are married in Brompton Oratory and live happily ever after. Frank leaves his interests in the oil world to learn how to cope with the Doria Empire and start trying to whistle up £1 million in cash for death-duties on the estate of his recently-deceased father-in-law.

Move now up to Scotland – to Falkland Place in fact – and we find Barbara, an old friend of Orietta's, married to Her Majesty's Keeper of the Palace, Major Michael Crichton Stuart. He is the grandson of the third Marquess of Bute whom we mentioned in the early part of this narrative. You will probably remember from a previous memoir of mine, that I first met Barbara when she was a little girl in Jerusalem in the late twenties. She and Major Michael were married in the war in Cairo and he was subsequently seriously wounded during the invasion of Italy. What with the strains and stresses of the time they had gone through, it seemed more than probable that they would have no family of their own, so in the early fifties they adopted two baby girls. (God has blessed them since with a girl and a boy of their own.) A few years later Frank and Orietta pay a visit to Falkland and probably had fun comparing a Palace with a Palazzo. However that may be, they were certainly struck by the lively sound that the patter of little feet can make, even in a Palace. They too had come to the conclusion that the strains and stresses of their particular times, as well as their enforced wait of fourteen years before getting married, would result in their having no family of their own either. So they decided to follow the example of Michael and Barbara and adopt a boy and a girl themselves. While this was being considered (legal adoption is a lengthy business) the year came round for the Passion Play at Oberammergau, 1960, and I had the pleasure of taking a group which included not only Veronica and Anita, but also Flip and Gertrude from Montreal. From Oberammergau we proceeded to Rome where Anita contacted her one-time colleague at Shell – now known officially as Commander Frank Doria Pogson Pamphili, because his late father-in-law had particularly asked him to preserve the ancient name by adding it to his own. Anita was invited to dinner one evening and became the first Dawson – so far – to set foot in the family home of our Dowager Duchess's great-grand-daughter (unless Ed and Elizabeth have unwittingly covered the ground during their rather thorough visit to the Eternal City in the Holy Year of 1950).

So in 1964 the first pair of little feet are installed in the Palazzo Doria and they belong to Jonathan Paul Andrew (named after the great Admiral Andrea Doria, the founder of the family). The next year the second pair of little feet arrived (also from a London orphanage) in the person of Gesine (after her Scottish grand-mother) Margaret Orietta Mary – and so the family is complete and completely happy. The strange thing is that, looking at various photographs of them, you would easily come to the conclusion that Jonathan and Gesine were blood-brother and sister and that Frank and Orietta were really their natural parents. Furthermore, the law of Italy stipulates that adopted children shall inherit the titles and estates of their adoptive parents, and thus the great Doria line will be saved from extinction. The strangest thing of all, however, is that four hundred years previously the great Admiral Andrea Doria had himself married late in life and then adopted a boy and a girl of his own and so ensured the family succession. In point of fact, one of them inherited the estates in the north of Italy and the other those in the south. They eventually married and the whole vast complex of possessions remained "in the family".

Maybe the future will add a few more links to this rather fascinating chain of ours and, as a contemporary footnote, we may add that a few weeks ago, when the

Holy Father conferred the Cardinal's ring on our Archbishop of St. Andrew's (or Andrea's) and Edinburgh, Major Michael and his wife were there and stayed at the Palazzo Doria. Much of the vast edifice is now let out in flats and apartments and Frank and Orietta lead a simple and unostentatious life with the minimum of domestic help and, like most people nowadays, the odd "Daily". Gone for ever are the days of the brilliant receptions for a thousand guests and the entertaining of kings and emperors. There are no regrets. Frank is happy keeping the complex Doria affairs in truly ship-shape and – if I might be allowed a last wise-crack – Bristol fashion. Orietta is equally happy, bringing up their children in a simple family atmosphere and developing their characters to enable them to cope with whatever conditions of life await them in the year 2000.

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