



When he was born in Turin (where the 2006 Winter Olympics were held), Victor Emmanuel—the son of Charles Albert (Carlo Alberto) and Maria Teresa (a woman of Austrian ancestry)—was not in line to take the throne of Italy.

At that time—in 1820—there was no Italian throne because Italy was not-yet a unified country.

Also, at that time, the soaring spire of the Mole Antonelliana was not part of Turin's landscape (since the grand building was not opened until 1888).



There were, however, various “Kingdoms” throughout the Italian Peninsula.

One of those kingdoms was ruled by Charles Albert. It was during the reign of Charles Albert that the kingdoms of Sardinia (an island off the western coast of Italy) and Piedmont (an area in northwest Italy) were united.



Many more political changes would occur during the life of this baby boy, but no one—including his parents—could have imagined that one day Victor Emmanuel would be honored with one of the world’s largest monuments.

More about that gigantic building later.

Schooled in what it meant to be an absolute ruler, which followed from a theory known as the “[Divine Right of Kings](#),” Victor Emmanuel preferred to study military techniques and teachings. When he was very young, his mother said of him:

*My little Victor is very docile; I have, however, some difficulty in teaching him, for he wants to be always running or jumping, but when he once learns a thing he rarely forgets it. (Life of Victor Emmanuel II, First King of Italy, Volume 1, written by Georgina Sarah Godkin and published in 1879, at page 38.)*

Young Victor’s schooling began at an early age, and he was up very early in the morning:

*They [Victor and his younger brother] were up at five o’clock in the morning, when they began their studies, and continued them until late in the day, only broken by the hours allotted for meals, and diversified by a fencing lesson, a long walk, or a six hours’ ride on horseback. (Godkin, at page 39.)*

When Victor was fifteen, his father became King. Victor himself was then known as the Duke of Savoy. He was more of a doer than a studier:

*His father’s training had not succeeded in making him a learned man, for his natural bent was towards action rather than study; but he was a keen observer of men and things, had a large share of good sense, wide sympathies, and shared to the full his father’s generous ambition to liberate Italy from the foreign yoke, and bring fresh lustre to the ancient race from which he sprang. (Godkin, at page 42.)*

This desire to free Italy from foreign control was particularly strong in Victor Emmanuel, even at a young age:

*Without a particle of personal vanity, this pride of race was a passion in Victor Emmanuel II. (Godkin, page 42.)*

How did this future “Father of the Fatherland” appear as a young man?

*The prince was of middle stature, broad shouldered, powerfully built, with a brown complexion, snub nose, and a heavy underjaw; his full brown beard, and fierce-looking moustache curling upon his cheek, were not then striking characteristics as [they were] afterwards [when he was older].*

*Notwithstanding this homely exterior, the intelligence, good sense and good feeling expressed in his broad open brow and kindly smile, won confidence and sympathy at a glance. His ardent, dauntless spirit might be read in the steady unflinching glance of his piercing dark eye, which was never seen to quail for an instant in the presence of any earthly peril. His manners were frank and simple, but not wanting in a certain soldierly dignity. (Godkin, page 43.)*

In 1842, when Victor was 22 years old, he married his cousin Princess Maria Adelaide (who was 19). Also of Austrian ancestry, just like Victor’s mother, Adelaide caused the people to worry that their future King might waver in his dedication to throwing-off the yoke of Austrian control in Lombardy and Venetia. They needn’t have worried:

*His [Victor Emmanuel’s] soul was so permeated with the idea of national independence that she could hardly love Victor without loving Italy. (Godkin, page 44.)*

Although he loved his wife, Victor was not faithful to her. She died at a young age:

...of an acute disease, not of a broken heart; but that he was guilty of certain gallantries during her lifetime, which must have caused her deep pain, is equally true. He had his faults, but they were redeemed by many noble qualities. (Godkin, page 46.)

In 1848, the time seemed right for an uprising against Austria. Revolutions had sprung-up elsewhere in Europe, why not in Italy?

For five days, during March of 1848, the people of Milan (located in Lombardy) were rejoicing. They had thrown-out the Austrians, but their joy was short-lived. Austria would not give-up control of its Italian territories so easily—and—not-enough Italians were able to band-together to resist the Austrians' advance.

Leading the charge of independence, Charles Albert lost the Battle of Novara. This caused him to abdicate in favor of his older son—Victor Emmanuel—who became King of Sardinia-Piedmont on March 24, 1849.

As King, Victor Emmanuel II developed a close working relationship with his Prime Minister, Camillo of Cavour. He was a strong supporter of Italian Risorgimento.

Developing strategies which gained them the support of political powers—who could help them oust the Austrians—the King and the Prime Minister were able to achieve their goal by 1859. With the Austrians gone from Lombardy, people in that part of Italy agreed to join with Sardinia-Piedmont. That meant Victor Emmanuel was their King, too.

By 1861, after Garibaldi delivered Southern Italy to Victor Emmanuel, the former Duke of Savoy became the first King of a mostly-unified Italy. All that was missing was Rome.

When the French soldiers who were protecting Rome and the Pope were expelled from Italy, in 1870, the country was fully united. In 1871, Victor Emmanuel moved to Rome which had become the country's new capital city.

The new King of Italy never liked living in Rome. He missed his life in Piedmont and died—in Rome—on the 9th of January, 1878. He was buried in Rome's Pantheon.

To commemorate all that the "Father of the Fatherland" had done for them, the Italian people erected a *huge* monument to the memory of the first king of a unified Italy.



Also known as *Altare della Patria* ("Altar of the Fatherland"), the National Monument to Victor Emmanuel II opened, in Rome, during 1925. It is one of the largest buildings, dedicated to the memory of a single individual, in the entire world.

Such was the impact of Victor Emmanuel, the rambunctious baby who was born in Turin on the 18th of March, 1820.

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