



For some reason, the mid-nineteenth century (when so many revolutions shook Europe) was notable for the large number of strange monarchs who ruled in the various countries. Click on the link to find out about one of them.

Not Strange (?)

Why do historians think I am strange? It is true that I hesitated a bit before making up my mind (or never made up my mind) on various issues—whether Piedmont should be liberal or not, whether to support the revolution of 1821 or not, whether to grant a constitution or not, whether to aid Italian unification or not, whether to favor the Church or not? But doesn't everyone have doubts?

Let me tell you a little about myself. I was born in Turin in 1798 and began my education in Geneva, then went to France, where I learned about French ideas. After Napoleon's fall, I returned to Turin but did not agree with the reactionary ideas of my uncle King Victor Emanuel I. So I made friends with a number of liberal nobles who turned around and asked me to join a conspiracy to implement the Spanish Constitution of 1812 in Piedmont. They thought I agreed, but I didn't really agree. Anyhow, when a revolution broke out and I became Regent for a while, I did proclaim that constitution although it took me a while.

My uncle Charles Felix, who had become king in the meantime, got mad as hell at me and asked the Austrians to restore him, which they did. When he returned, he wouldn't talk to me and I had to leave for Florence. He said that after he died I couldn't be king, but luckily Metternich talked to him. Metternich



was so conservative that he didn't even think a king could disinherit his own heir. My uncle was a tough old character, but he finally gave in. But as proof of my conversion to conservatism, in 1823 I had to participate in the French expedition that put down the Spanish revolution that had started in 1820 and I had to promise that after I became king of Piedmont I wouldn't give a constitution.

After he died I rejected an appeal from the Italian liberals and instituted a reactionary policy instead, even though people thought that I was a liberal. I didn't mind if there were economic changes that helped modernize my state—after all, that was good—but I wouldn't give a constitution and I cracked down on the opposition. That seemed to upset people who thought that in my heart I was liberal. But, frankly, I didn't know exactly what to do. In early 1848 a revolution broke out in Paris against Louis Philippe and riots took place in my capital. The people demanded a constitution, but did I give in? No! Actually, when my advisers explained to me that if I gave a constitution I would be popular, I said no, because I had promised my dying uncle that I wouldn't. Then the demonstrations really got dangerous, so I did give a constitution. And guess what? I became popular!

I promised the patriots, indirectly, that when the time came I would support Italian independence against the Austrians. It's true that I missed many an opportunity to do so and on many occasions I was contradictory in my policies, but in 1848, after the revolutions in Milan, I tried to help with my army.



Unfortunately, I was defeated because I hesitated a bit and because people didn't quite trust me. I signed an armistice with the Austrians, but the patriots accused me of treason, so I broke the armistice. But that was also a bad move because I was defeated again at Novara in March 1849. I tried to find death on the battlefield, but couldn't. I just couldn't win for losing, so I abdicated in favor of my son Victor Emanuel II; that was a decisive step.

I went into exile in Oporto, Portugal, where I only lasted a few months before I died on July 28 of a broken heart.

Do you think I was indecisive?

Charles Albert
Former King of Sardinia (Piedmont)