

# Britain and the Italian Risorgimento

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Towards the end of his life, Gladstone recalled the risorgimento as "among the greatest marvels of our time".<sup>1</sup> The evangelical leader, Lord Shaftesbury, had a strong anti-papalist motive for thinking it "the most wonderful, the most honourable and the most unexpected manifestation of courage, virtue and self-control the world has ever seen".<sup>2</sup> Other contemporaries however, deplored it. Many Catholics continued to believe that the Pope's temporal power as sovereign of Rome was necessary for their spiritual welfare and were appalled to see him dethroned by the armed forces of anticlericalism. Queen Victoria and Disraeli had different but serious doubts about a united Italy, and Lord Acton called the risorgimento a triumph of unscrupulous statesmanship which had tainted a noble idea by resort to illiberal means.

Notwithstanding these political differences, Italy was a country of predilection for the British political class and electorate, most of whom had an education that was weighted heavily towards the history and literature of ancient Rome. Nor was this interest merely in the past as it had been for an earlier generation who travelled on the Grand Tour. Shelley, Byron and Keats were far more familiar

1. W.E. Gladstone, *Gleanings of Past Years 1851–1877*, London, 1879, 4/195.

2. *Cavour e L'Inghilterra: Carteggio con V.E. d'Azeglio*, Bologna, 1933, 3/123 (12 Sept. 1860).

with the Italian language and literature than with French or German. Among other writers and artists who welcomed the new renaissance of Italy were Dickens, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Landor, Clough, Thackeray, J.S. Mill, Samuel Rogers, George Eliot, Meredith, the Brownings, Swinburne, Carlyle, Harriet Martineau, Turner, Whistler, Samuel Smiles, Leigh Hunt, Froude, Bulwer Lytton – some of whom contributed money to help Garibaldi and sat on Mazzini's committees. The Italian patriotic movement gained from this, but even more useful was the important fact that politicians in London knew much more about Italy than about Germany or the United States. No other issue in foreign policy attracted so much sympathy as the "Italian question".

Charles James Fox, Lord Holland, and Earl Grey of the Reform Bill spoke Italian and wrote it passably. So, later, did a succession of prime ministers in office for over thirty years of Queen Victoria's reign, and this was another remarkable fact that was not without importance in politics.

Much of this sympathy was disinterested and came from a genuine affection for things Italian. But official policy must be governed by national interest, and Britain's bias in favour of liberty and constitutional reform for other countries was not entirely unselfish. Self-interest as well as idealism explains her readiness to back national independence in Greece, Belgium, Portugal and the South American republics. At first there was not much advocacy of Italian political unification, and this is not surprising since before the 1830s almost no Italians thought unification possible or even desirable. The Italian language was unknown to the vast majority of them. Loyalties inside Italy were to each region rather than to any notional nation, and every outside observer could see that Mazzini's patriotic insurrections had the support of only a few. Count Cavour, too, who as chief minister of Piedmont after 1852 was the foremost politician in the Italian peninsula, wrote as late as 1856 that the prospect of unification was nonsensical<sup>3</sup>, and his authoritative predecessor Cesare Balbo called it a mad idea of "schoolboys, fifth-rate poets and stump orators".<sup>4</sup> But an increasing number of politicians in London, as well as advocating internal

3. *Ibid.* 1/463 (12 April 1856).

4. C. Balbo, *Delle Speranze d'Italia*, Capolago, 1844, 21.

constitutional freedoms inside Italy, had pragmatic reasons for favouring something that was as important, namely the independence of this country from French and Austrian armies of occupation. As for territorial unification, only in the 1850s when more Italians began to turn towards this apparently remote possibility did such a revolutionary objective find many supporters in England.

One primary consideration in London was the paramount need to avoid another European war such as had ravaged the continent in the time of the first Napoleon and created the most extensive tyranny experienced for centuries. Another consideration was the encouragement of timely political reforms so as to lessen the risk of violent revolution, because revolutions had incalculable results and carried the risk of leading to a war in which the rest of Europe might become involved. Only if the balance of strategic power was broken and peace endangered would more positive and active intervention seem desirable. Britain was singular in having nothing to gain from a European war and a great deal to lose, provided at least that a continental equilibrium of power continued to guarantee her security. Only when Italy presented a danger of revolution and war did explicit action become advisable so as to limit this risk; though, even then, official intervention rarely moved beyond the level of warnings and advice.

One basic premise of foreign policy was that Austria had been Britain's major ally in defeating Napoleon, and support for Austria seemed to be the only means of preventing either a revival of French imperialism or a Russian advance into the Balkans. This dual threat from France and Russia explains why the Austrian empire was allowed by the Congress of Vienna to remain in control of Lombardy and Venice.

Nevertheless one important point of difference remained between Austria and the British: Metternich believed that liberal reforms would encourage revolution, whereas Lord Palmerston assumed the opposite and even the conservative Castlereagh in 1815 had been anxious for the Austrians to adopt a more relaxed and liberal policy towards their Italian subjects.<sup>5</sup>

5. C.K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh 1815-1822*, London, 1925, 108.

Other differences of opinion existed inside Britain itself. Lord Bentinck, who became virtual governor of Sicily in 1811, gave this island an independent constitution, and then encouraged Tuscans, Genoese and Lombards to rebel against Napoleon so as to create a less divided Italy. Bentinck was ahead of his time in believing 'that the national will must sooner or later triumph' and then an Italian nation would become "a powerful barrier both against Austria and France".<sup>6</sup> Castlereagh, however, was a realist more interested in bolstering Austria than encouraging Italian liberation and nationality. Italy in 1815 was therefore allowed to remain divided into seven sovereign states with only minor territorial changes. But one future prime minister, Lord John Russell, agreed with Bentinck and protested at the time that the Treaty of Vienna was underwriting a restoration of reactionary governments without consideration of popular wishes, and he warned that this might harm British interests by acting as an incitement to revolution.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless one substantial change was instigated by Britain in 1815 when she advocated the annexation to Piedmont of the Former republic of Genoa so as to create a strong buffer state between France and Austria; and at one point the tentative suggestion was made in London to include Lombardy in this enlarged subalpine kingdom. Some Italians remembered that, a century earlier, Britain had made possible the Piedmontese annexation of Sardinia which formally converted a minor duchy into a kingdom.<sup>8</sup> So began the process by which this north-western region of Italy emerged later in the 19th century as a nucleus of national unity.

Popular wishes inside Italy are not ascertainable. We know that many Genoese resented being transferred to an authoritarian regime in Piedmont and may among the educated classes of Milan resented being governed from Vienna. Yet in each region the bulk of rural society and often the city proletariat showed that, passively or actively, they preferred throne and altar to the small groups of

6. John Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck: the Making of a Liberal Imperialist*, London, 1974, 167.

7. Lord John Russell, *A Letter to the Rt. Hon. Lord Holland on Foreign Politics*, London, 1831 (written in 1819), iii-iv, 28.

8. *Camera dei Deputati: discussioni*, 20 July 1862, p. 3456 (Durando, the foreign minister); Nello Rosselli, *Saggi sul Risorgimento e Altri Scritti*, Turin, 1946, 29, 32.

intellectuals and dissidents who favoured independence and constitutional reform. Russell was nevertheless proved correct when local risings took place after 1820 and were put down by Austrian troops. Successive British governments were obliged to accept this repressive Austrian action, but did so only after protesting against interference in the internal affairs of independent states. After 1831 further gratuitous advice was sent from London to King Charles Albert of Piedmont to treat his political prisoners with greater leniency, though the advice was not accepted. An attempt was also made to encourage political reforms in Rome where the Pope's government was widely criticised as the most inefficient and corrupt in Europe: the message sent was that "governments are instituted for the benefit of nations, not nations for the benefit of governments".<sup>9</sup> But the suggestion that the papacy should introduce liberal constitutional changes was not received with enthusiasm at the Vatican.

Any move towards constitutional government received almost automatic support in England, not least because constitutional assemblies were likely to be a prophylactic against revolution. Independence from foreign intervention was also desirable, but was at first given a lower priority since, being an objective of Mazzini and the democrats, it carried the risk of war and revolution. Giuseppe Mazzini, the chief ideologue of Italian patriotism, was also a social revolutionary who challenged every vested interest in the Italian peninsula. According to Gioberti and Cavour, both of them prime ministers of Piedmont who ideally would have preferred an Italy free from foreign occupation, Mazzini was their most dangerous enemy, more dangerous indeed than any threat to Italian independence from France or Austria.<sup>10</sup> Despite a demand from Piedmont for his extradition to face a death sentence in Piedmont, Mazzini was allowed to live in England after 1837 and remained there for nearly all of his adult life, making it a base from which to organise a succession of abortive insurrections in every region of

9. Emilia Morelli, in *Relazioni tra Inghilterra e Toscana nel Risorgimento*, Lucca, 1953, 161-67.

10. *Gioberti-Massari Carteggio (1838-1852)*, ed. G. Balsamo-Crivelli, Turin, 1920, 273; *Cavour e l'Inghilterra*, 2.177; *Il Carteggio Cavour-Nigra dal 1858 al 1861*, Bologna, 1926, 1/55.

Italy. This republican revolutionary believed in Italian independence and unification, and did more than anyone to bring these goals to the attention of the outside world. But he caused dissension by his suspicion of constitutional and parliamentary government. Nor was this suspicion entirely without reason, because Italian parliaments represented a minuscule class of electors who had no interest in Italian unity and who, like Cavour himself, feared national independence if it meant revolution or a success for their democratic opponents.

Mazzini's views were at first written off as utopian but were given immense publicity in England by an event that took place in 1844. After discovering that his letters were being mysteriously opened, he received evidence from a friendly official that this was by order of Lord Aberdeen at the Foreign Office. Later it emerged from two parliamentary commissions of enquiry that this surveillance was at first carried out illegally without official warrant, and public opinion was further startled to discover that it had taken place at the request of Metternich in Vienna; also that the correspondence of some members of parliament and foreign ambassadors was being intercepted and read by the Foreign Office with no regard to parliamentary privilege or diplomatic immunity.

Aberdeen denied that any compromising information was passed to Austria, but this was untrue, and furthermore the Austrians informed the Pope and the King of Naples of what Aberdeen told them. Mazzini cannot have broken any British law because he was never prosecuted, but he assumed, probably wrongly, that information provided by the British government was later responsible for the execution of some of his friends in southern Italy.

It would be hard to overestimate the importance of this episode in drawing the Italian question to the notice of politicians and public opinion in Britain. Few people hitherto had heard of Mazzini, but parliamentary debates on the matter now took up as much as 559 columns of Hansard. According to Macaulay it was "utterly abhorrent to the public feeling" that the proud record of asylum for foreign exiles was being broken. The Solicitor General admitted that this prolonged parliamentary discussion was "one of the most disagreeable and painful he had ever heard within the walls of the

House", and Aberdeen deeply regretted what he had done, since "this Mazzini affair has been the most unpleasant in which I have ever been engaged".<sup>11</sup>

Previous governments in London had encouraged revolutions against Bonaparte when it suited British interests, but now the British seemed to be secretly backing the abuse of arbitrary power against people struggling for freedom. Several members of parliament came forward to testify their personal knowledge of Mazzini's "high intellect and pure and unspotted morality". When the Home Secretary, after confessing that he now heard of Mazzini's name for the first time, accused him without any evidence of being an assassin, Carlyle, whose political views were far removed from Mazzini's but who knew him well, wrote to the *Times* in his defence, saying that this lonely exile was "a man of genius and virtue, a man of sterling veracity, humanity and nobleness of mind".<sup>12</sup>

Palmerston and Russell were the two politicians who felt most strongly that European peace and quiet might be best served by radical change in the way Italy was governed. Palmerston was in office for over forty years, being foreign minister in 1846–1851 and prime minister for almost all the decisive decade 1855–1865; while Russell was prime minister for the years 1846–1852 and foreign minister from 1859 to 1865. Both continued to accept that British interests required a strong Austrian empire north of the Alps, but their support for Metternich weakened after 1846 when the Austrians, in breach of the Vienna settlement, annexed the free republic of Cracow and occupied the papal town of Ferrara. If this Austrian defiance of a European congress were condoned, Mazzini would be able to argue that the sanction of legitimism and treaty-rights could no longer be plausibly invoked as a safe guard of European peace against a democratic revolution. The conservative *Times*, very unusually, protested at Austria's 'outrageous policy' against Italian "independence and nationality".<sup>13</sup> With the Queen's consent a British fleet was therefore sent to Italy to encourage liberal reforms and avert further Austrian "aggression". Cobden, no revolutionary, made

11. *Hansard* vol. LXXV, columns 1274–275 (24 June 1844); *Ibid.* vol. LXXVII, col. 967 (21 Feb. 1845); *The Times*, 22 Aug. 1907.

12. *The Times*, 19 June 1844; *Hansard* vol. LXXIX, col. 206 (4 April 1845).

13. *The Times*, 12 Feb. and 13 July 1847.

a triumphal tour of the Italian peninsula in the Spring of 1847 and spoke publicly in favour of "nationality and union".<sup>14</sup> Lord Minto, a cabinet minister, was sent there in response to a personal appeal by Pope Pius IX and urged Italian governments to form a customs' union under British protection "so that Italy would become a great nation standing on its own feet".<sup>15</sup> Palmerston instructed Minto to encourage "national and unified sentiment",<sup>16</sup> and this official envoy was still in Italy when, responding to popular pressure, constitutions were granted in the next few weeks by the rulers of Naples, Tuscany and Piedmont.

In March 1848 the citizens of Milan drove out their Austrian garrison in a remarkable revolution, and Charles Albert declared war to assist them. He did so against British advice, but Palmerston, once war had begun, hoped that Metternich would take this chance to surrender Lombardy, and even hinted that England might join France against the Austrians if hostilities were allowed to develop into a general war.<sup>17</sup> Austria, he wrote, might well become a threat to European peace so long as her harsh and authoritarian policy encouraged revolution in Lombardy and Venice. Europe needed her as a Great Power but "Austria will be much better out of Italy than in it", and he was ready to offer mediation in the hope that Piedmont might annex not just Lombardy, but also Venice, Parma, Modena, perhaps even Bologna.<sup>18</sup> Disraeli took a different view and criticised 'the sentimental principle of nationality' which was leading England to interfere in matters that did not concern her. Gladstone was another who still could not welcome "the purely abstract idea of Italian nationality" or Charles Albert's act of "aggression". And the Prince Consort was now sufficiently alarmed to tell the Austrians in a private letter that he was on their side against the British prime minister and his "heartless, obstinate and revengeful" colleagues. The Queen and Prince Albert

14. Antonio Boselli, in *Il Risorgimento Italiano*, Turin, May 1914, 442.

15. Eusebio Artom, in *Atti del XXVII Congresso del Risorgimento*, Milan, 1948, 69.

16. *Gran Bretagna e Italia nei Documenti della Missione Minto*, ed. F. Curato, Rome, 1970, 1/128.

17. Nicomede Bianchi, *Storia Documentata della diplomazia Europea in Italia dall'Anno 1814 all'Anno 1861*, Turin, 1869, 5/406, 409; A.J.P. Taylor, *The Italian Problem in European Diplomacy, 1847-1849*, Manchester, 1934, 64.

18. *Gran Bretagna e . . . la Missione Minto*, cit., 2/170-71; Evelyn Ashley, *The Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*, London, 1876, 1/102.



delighted when Radetzky defeated the Piedmontese at Custoza, which was a proper punishment for their "most unjust and unscrupulous attack on Austria".<sup>19</sup>

Towards the end of 1848, after Pius IX was turned out of Rome by another revolution, a Roman republic was set up, and soon afterwards four armies from France, Austria, Naples and Spain were sent to crush its volunteer defence force. In 1849 the desperate resistance of the Roman republic under Garibaldi and Mazzini was watched with enthusiasm and earned the reluctant admiration of even the *Times*.<sup>20</sup> After French troops restored papal authority, the conviction was reinforced that Italy would remain a danger so long as French soldiers stayed in Rome to guard the Pope and while Austrian troops still held Lombardy. Palmerston deeply regretted the presence of the French in Rome and warned Pius that his temporal power – "the worst and most anomalous government in the civilised world", or "the real plague-spot of Italy" as it was called by the conservative Lord Derby – was doomed unless the papacy carried out promises of reform made in 1831 and 1847;<sup>21</sup> but to no avail. Apprehension was all the greater when, in December 1849, Louis Napoleon became president of France and two years later revived for himself his uncle's ominous title of emperor. By that time only in Piedmont did constitutional government survive in Italy, where Cavour tried to introduce some of the parliamentary practices he had studied in person at Westminster. Over the rest of Italy, British influence declined as autocratic governments recovered their former authority.

In 1851 another event had a striking impact on public opinion in Britain. Gladstone happened to be in Naples when one of his Italian friends was arbitrarily imprisoned by the Bourbon King Ferdinand II, and two pamphlets he then wrote about the horrifying state of Neapolitan justice and prisons rank among the finest polemical writing in the English language. The first pamphlet went through

19. *Hansard* vol. CI, col. 147 (Disraeli, 16 Aug. 1848); Gladstone, introduction to Luigi Carlo Farini, *The Roman State from 1815 to 1850*, London, 1851, 1/ix; Frank Eyck, *The Prince Consort*, London, 1959, 114-15, 118.

20. *The Quarterly Review*, June 1849, 238; *Ibid.* Sept. 1849, 598-99; *The Times*, 11 May and 5 July 1849.

21. *Hansard*, vol. CVI, col. 739 (22 June 1849); *Ibid.* vol. CLII, col. 45; Ashley, *Life of Palmerston*, 1/126-27.

fourteen editions and Palmerston sent copies to British embassies abroad for widespread circulation throughout Europe. It described the Bourbon government as being "an outrage upon religion, upon civilisation, upon humanity, and upon decency": its words about 'the negation of God erected into a system of government', a phrase Gladstone heard from a Neapolitan acquaintance, eventually entered the Oxford book of quotations. There is some irony in the fact that Lord Vernon wrote in similar vein about the prisons in the liberal Piedmontese Kingdom, but his report received no comparable publicity, a fact that may possibly have influenced the direction taken by the risorgimento. Gladstone, incidentally, was still a tory, which meant that no longer were whigs and radicals at Westminster the only advocates of radical political change in Italy.

No other British or Italian politician has ever known more than Gladstone about the culture and history of the other country, and this was another significant fact that influenced the course of events. Among prime ministers in Piedmont, only Massimo d'Azeglio knew as much about the rest of Italy. Gladstone not only spoke Italian with some fluency – as did Palmerston, Russell, Derby and Lord Malmesbury – but could write poems in Italian and translated portions of Dante, Manzoni and Farini. The books he took on his Italian travels included writings by Alfieri, Foscolo, Ariosto, Goldoni, Boccaccio and Rosmini. He had a detailed, first-hand knowledge of Sicily at a time when northern politicians never visited that island. In 1855 he even encouraged an act of piracy to smuggle Poerio and Settembrini out of their Neapolitan prison and, almost incredibly, obtained secret-service money from the British government to fit out a vessel for Garibaldi to effect their escape. The director of the British museum was one of those who intended to be part of this buccaneer expedition and obtained leave of absence for this purpose from the museum's trustees.<sup>22</sup> When the ship foundered off the coast at Yarmouth the enterprise came to nothing, but from now onwards Gladstone believed that Britain had a right to act by more "forcible intervention" in Italy.<sup>23</sup>

22. G.B. Henderson, *Crimean War Diplomacy and other Historical essays*, Glasgow, 1947, 239; *The Edinburgh Review*, April 1881, 491–93.

23. Derek Beales, *England and Italy 1859–1860*, London, 1961, 27 (Gladstone's letter to Lacaita, 25 Oct. 1856).

In 1856, when a peace congress met at Paris after the Crimean war, Lord Clarendon the foreign minister spoke against the presence of foreign armies in Italy and in favour of political reforms. This was the first time that such matters had been formally placed before the attention of a European congress, and it was done by someone who, like Gladstone and Cobden, was very far from being a radical revolutionary. After his speech had been incorporated in the protocols of the congress, Clarendon could claim to possess a formal endorsement in international law to act more positively on behalf of Italian patriotism. But Cavour failed to exploit this important fact. Misreading Clarendon's intention, the Piedmontese minister inexplicably convinced himself that the British were ready to fight against their ally Austria in order to win Lombardy for Piedmont. There was much good will in London, but such sympathy could only be dissipated by an attempt to drag England into a war where Piedmontese but not British interests were involved. When, too late, Cavour realised his mistake, he tried to recover lost ground by a further uncharacteristic error when he secretly intrigued with the tory opposition at Westminster to promote a vote of censure against Palmerston's government. Quite apart from the impropriety of this action, he quite failed to appreciate that the tories were stronger supporters of Austria than the whigs. His clumsy intervention effectively antagonised both political parties at a time when he urgently needed their help.

At the end of 1858 Cavour was incautious enough to inform one British diplomat<sup>24</sup> that he was still bent on provoking another European war against Austria for what he used to call the aggrandisement of Piedmont. Once again he failed to understand that British politicians, despite wanting Austria to withdraw from Italy, were absolutely opposed to using armed force except as a very last resort, especially in a war that France was likely to exploit for extending her northern frontier into Belgium, to the Rhine and to the Alps. Palmerston began to fear that the Piedmontese might end by forcing him into fighting on the Austrian side because, however much he sympathised with Italy, his overriding interest was to counter French aggressiveness and retain Austria as a

24. *The Times*, 25 Sept. 1858 (Lord Amphill).

necessary factor in the equilibrium of Europe. As the British ambassador Lord Cowley commented, "I wish that I could believe that Sardinia had as much the real good of Italy at heart as she certainly has her own aggrandisement".<sup>25</sup>

Cavour was fortunate that neither the extent of his ambitions nor his choice of revolutionary means were fully appreciated in London. In April 1859 he secretly sent a large consignment of arms to assist a possible insurrection against Austria in the Balkans. In private he talked of 'setting fire to the four corners of the world' and of being ready to fight against Britain if necessary. He spoke of making a military alliance with Tsarist Russia for this purpose and also allying with the United States which – as he had fancifully planned some years earlier – might be used to threaten the British with the loss of Canada and the West Indies.<sup>26</sup> Luckily these extraordinary remarks were not known outside Turin, but in London Cavour's policy looked unrealistically provocative; apart from which it would "endanger the liberties of Piedmont, who might find too late that she had been no more than the pioneer and advanced guard of France, and that in grasping at the shadow of power she had sacrificed the substance of liberty".<sup>27</sup> Nor, when Cavour's desperate appeal for volunteers in Italy met a poor response, was it clear that the rest of Italy had much enthusiasm for the expansion of Piedmont. 'Surely twenty millions of human beings who considered themselves maltreated would furnish mote than a few thousand recruits', was Cowley's comment.<sup>28</sup>

By persistence and a good deal of luck, Cavour got his war in 1859, and a large French army won the two battles of Magenta and Solferino on his behalf. Although he strangely continued to believe that the tories in Britain were more likely than the whigs to endorse his warlike plans and might even want to participate in the fighting,<sup>29</sup>

25. Public Record Office (PRO), F.O. 519/225 (24 Jan. 1859).

26. Giuseppe Massari, *Diario dalle Cento Voci 1858–1860*, ed. Emilia Morelli, Rocca San Casciano, 1959, 140, 142, 147–79, 161; 17 Oct. 1859, Benzi to Daborminda, *Ministero degli Esteri: Affari Politici Vari 1815–61; Tutti gli Scritti di Camillo Cavour*, ed. C. Pischedda and G. Talamo, Turin 1976, 3/1150 (1 April 1848).

27. Lord Clarendon, in House of Lords debate, 18 April 1859, col. 1847.

28. 28 Mar. 1859, Cowley to Malmesbury, F.O. 519/9.

29. 20 July 1859, Hudson, *Russell Papers*, PRO 30/22/66.

he was unexpectedly helped when in June 1859 the tory government of Derby gave way to the more pro-Italian trio of Palmerston, Russell and Gladstone. The views of these three men were not identical. Russell, the foreign minister, hoped that Piedmont might now win Lombardy. Gladstone at least agreed in wanting a larger kingdom of northern Italy at the expense of Austria, but it should not be too large since that "might be prejudicial to the internal equilibrium of Italy itself over which the House of Savoy might seek to domineer". Much more positive and adventurous was the prime minister, Palmerston, who once again as in 1848 hoped that Piedmont might be able to acquire Venice, Parma, Modena, and possibly Tuscany.<sup>30</sup>

Such opinions had at first little practical relevance, because the main burden of the war had been carried by the French army and Napoleon III wanted only a loose federal union of Italian states, a federation of which both Austria and the Pope would be members. This was strongly opposed in London, because a clear majority of the other Italian states would be ranged against any extension of liberal constitutional principles. Palmerston helped to foil the project and continued to believe "that on general principles, the larger and stronger Piedmont could be made, the better it would be for the happiness of the people united to it and for the peace of Europe as depending on the tranquillity of Italy".<sup>31</sup> Gladstone more or less agreed and thought that, although the aggrandisement of Piedmont might hitherto have seemed dangerous, now it would avert something worse,<sup>32</sup> and this was a very substantial admission. The Queen demurred at the advice of her new ministers, upon which they threatened to resign and leave her with the difficult task of finding an alternative government. A brusque note from the palace explained with feigned regret that "the Queen wishes that she could join with Lord Palmerston in rejoicing at the unity of Italy".<sup>33</sup> but Russell impertinently pointed out that she held her own throne by virtue of a rebellion against the Stuarts in 1688, and the peoples

30. *Il Problema Veneto e l'Europa 1859-1866: Inghilterra*, Venice, 1966, ed. N. Blakiston, 2/12 (28 June 1859, Palmerston); *British Library Mss.* 44748, ff. 93-8 (Gladstone); Beales, cit. 94-7.

31. 18 August 1859, Palmerston to Russell, *Russell Papers*, 30/22/20.

32. 22 August 1859, *Russell Papers*, 30/22/19.

33. 3 Jan. 1860, *Royal Archives Windsor*, J. 32.25.

of Italy ought surely to be allowed a similar right to regulate their own internal affairs against foreign military occupation. Foreign occupation "for upwards of forty years has been the misfortune of Italy and the danger of Europe".<sup>34</sup> When the year 1860 opened, the *Times*, which so far had thought Italian unity "a crude and impracticable abstraction without a particle of support from history or reason", accepted it as a possibility if it truly represented popular wishes and if it could be obtained as a clear manifestation of popular wishes. The prime minister and foreign minister even wondered about using the threat of a possible war against Austria to make her withdraw north of the Alps.<sup>35</sup> They must have been aware that such a course of action would hardly appeal to the rest of the cabinet. But in any case Cavour had other ideas, calculating that his best hope for further annexations in Italy lay not in British support but in a renewal of his alliance with France. For this purpose he secretly agreed to cede Savoy and Nice to Napoleon; and unfortunately the politicians in London already knew this before he promised them that he would under no circumstances contemplate any such thing.<sup>36</sup> His offer to surrender national territory was, as he admitted, unconstitutional. It was furthermore against international law since it meant breaking a provision in the treaty of 1815 which gave an international guarantee of permanent neutrality to parts of Savoy. He can have had no doubt that this extension of the French frontier to the Alps would antagonise the British. But he took another calculated risk in deciding that he had less to gain from Palmerston than from a belligerent and expansionist France.

By 1 May, Russell was hoping that Cavour would fall from power as being "too French and too tricky".<sup>37</sup> But one week later the whole situation changed dramatically when Garibaldi, furious at the cession to France of his birthplace in Nice, defied the Piedmontese minister and set out with a thousand volunteers to assist a popular revolution in Sicily against the government of the Neapolitan Bourbons. Until this moment, Russell's opinion was that the union of all Italy might

34. G. P. Gooch, *The Late Correspondence of Lord John Russell*, London, 1925, 2/254-55; *Foreign Office Confidential Print*, 10 Sept. 1859, 93 (16 Aug. 1859, Russell to Cowley).

35. *The Times*, 22 March 1859; *Ibid.* 8 October 1859; Gooch, 2/250; Ashley, 2/174-80.

36. 3 and 10 Feb. 1860, Hudson to Russell, F.O. 67/255.

37. 1 May 1860, Russell to Palmerston, *Palmerston Papers*.

"make a despotism instead of a free government, an unwieldy power instead of a compact one".<sup>38</sup> But recent events persuaded him not to discountenance an attempt to free Sicily from the cruel and dangerous authoritarianism of King Ferdinand.<sup>39</sup> What Garibaldi then did by his conquest of southern Italy was to show that Italian unification would not necessarily mean Cavour's subservience to French imperialism, nor would it mean another European war; it need not be a dynastic conquest by Piedmont, but might well be a spontaneous movement for self-determination and therefore much more acceptable to liberal, anti-French sentiment in England. While Cavour was now seen in London as unscrupulous and untrustworthy, Garibaldi was patently honest, a proclaimed enemy of Cavour and Napoleon, someone unique among politicians in being immune to the temptations of power or personal wealth, and who agreed with Mazzini in wanting the liberation of Italy from both France and Austria.

The enthusiasm in England for the filibustering venture of Garibaldi's famous thousand helped to win backing for Italy at this critical moment and became a significant fact in the final success of the risorgimento. G.M. Trevelyan later described its leader as having "the most romantic life that history records".<sup>40</sup> A.J. P. Taylor thought him "the most wholly admirable man in modern history".<sup>41</sup> As a result of his achievement he was given the unusual accolade of being made a freeman of the City of London at a time when politicians in Italy still considered him a dangerous radical and semi-outlaw.

Palmerston, Russell and Gladstone were all proud to invite this revolutionary general to lunch or dinner at a time when no minister in Italy could conceivably have thought of doing so. Money to help him arrived from Darwin, Florence Nightingale, the Duke of Wellington, Lady Byron, Lady Palmerston, Mrs. Gladstone and a host of others. A week after the expedition set sail, the British prime minister could say that there could now be no objection to the union of all Italy. Palmerston and Russell continued to believe that, because

38. 25 Aug. 1859, Russell to Corbett, *Russell Papers*, 30/22/109.

39. 11 Aug. 1859, Russell to Elliot, *ibid.* 30/22/111.

40. G.M. Trevelyan, *Garibaldi's Defence of the Roman Republic*, London, 1907, 23.

41. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Observer*, 17 Oct 1965; *The Listener*, 21 July 1977.

of the differences between north and south, Italy might be stronger and better governed as two separate states, but this was an opinion of Italians to accept or reject.<sup>42</sup>

Much had changed in the forty-five years since 1815. Italian patriotism had not been strong enough in 1815 to present a major problem for British foreign policy. After 1830, Mazzini had made it a problem, but one best put on one side so long as it posed a possible danger to European peace. By 1860, however, it could on the contrary be seen as a useful component of a European equilibrium and hence deserved every encouragement.

No Englishman sailed with Garibaldi's thousand though many defied British law and joined him a few weeks later. A British naval detachment happened to be ashore at Marsala when the expedition landed there, and this coincidence inadvertently gave the two unarmed transport vessels several hours to land their men before the Neapolitan ships off-shore dared to risk blowing them out of the water:<sup>43</sup> this episode reminded Garibaldi of how, when he commanded the Uruguayan fleet in 1842, a British naval squadron under Commodore Purvis had placed itself so as to prevent hostile fire by the Irish Admiral Brown who commanded the Argentine forces on his flagship the "General Belgrano".<sup>44</sup> Garibaldi's extraordinary attack on Palermo was then helped by other British naval officers and by the *Times'* correspondent who gave him information about the city's defences, and the British naval commander at Palermo made no secret of his sympathies when he formally protested at the Neapolitan bombardment of this city. More importantly, the British government refused a request to join the French in offering mediation, and then rejected another French suggestion for joint action to stop Garibaldi's landing on the mainland of Calabria. Minor assistance was also forthcoming from other British officials, including consuls in Eastern Sicily and naval ratings on leave who helped the invading force to build bridges and move artillery. When a victorious Garibaldi entered the town of

42. 17 May 1860, Palmerston to Russell, *Russell Papers*, 30/22/21; 23 July 1860, Russell to Elliot, F.O. 165/132.

43. 14 May 1860, Marryat to Admiral Fanshawe, F.O. 165/135.

44. Giuseppe Garibaldi, *Memorie* (Edizione Nazionale degli Scritti), Rocca San Casciano, 1932, 2/164-5.



Naples he was accompanied not only by the Cornishman Colonel Peard, who had been used to impersonate him during the advance, but by Palmerston's private secretary, as well as Edwin James, M.P. and the Public Orator of Cambridge University.

These were minor matters but they accurately reflect widespread enthusiasm in England and Scotland for the conquest of southern Italy. British policy opposed revolutions whenever they might create more difficulties than they solved, but this particular revolution appeared to have huge popular support and carried no threat to British interests or the balance of power. The proprietor of the *Times* wrote of Garibaldi that it was doubtful whether "in all history there has been such another instance of the right man in the right place".<sup>45</sup>

More substantial help was given a few weeks later in September 1860 when Cavour invaded the papal states, because this invasion diminished the fear of a Franco-Piedmontese alliance. France and other countries protested and withdrew their ambassadors from Turin, but Russell gave what Cavour called an "immense service" to Italy by publicly welcoming the success of this revolutionary action. When a new Kingdom of Italy was at last proclaimed to exist in 1861, Britain was the first to recognise it, followed with some reluctance by France. Even more remarkable, the hope was even expressed in London that the kingdom would be able by negotiation of purchase to acquire Venice and Rome in the course of 1861, so rounding off national unity. Various newspapers in England and Scotland even hoped that Garibaldi would finish the process by means of further revolutionary action.<sup>46</sup>

Cavour was the one Italian politician with the skill and experience to bring about this final success for Mazzini's dream, but his tragic death in June 1861 left Italy incomplete. In the last months of his life he also calculated once again that he had more to gain from French arms than pacifist British diplomacy, and possibly this gamble might have succeeded had he lived longer. He secretly hoped that, as in

45. *The History of the Times*, London, 1939, 2/291 (14 Sept. 1860, John Walter to Delane).

46. M.B. Urban, *British Opinion and Policy on the Unification of Italy 1856-1861*, Scottsdale, 1938, 507-08; *Cavour e l'Inghilterra*, 3/131, 136, 188; *Further Correspondence Relating to the Affairs of Italy: December 1859 to June 1860*, London, 1861, 5-6 (1 Jan. 1860, Russell to Fane).

1859, he could precipitate another European war and a series of revolutions "from Dalmatia to the Baltic". This meant adopting much of Mazzini's policy, but it was something he now needed for what he called "reasons of internal policy": winning Venice by force of arms would "facilitate the fusion of northern with southern Italy" and perhaps be one step towards recovering for the "latin races" their former predominant position in the Mediterranean.<sup>47</sup> But in such a war he knew that the bulk of the fighting would again be left to the French, in return for which he was ready to incur British disapprobation by supporting Napoleon's extension of France's northern frontier. Again he prepared for hostilities by sending more cases of arms to assist a revolution in the Balkans, and when this was discovered he untruthfully pretended that the guns had been sent by Garibaldi – though they were clearly marked as coming from his own arsenal in Turin.

Spreading mischievous stories against Garibaldi was part of Cavour's policy because he needed to recapture the *risorgimento* from the radical democrats who momentarily challenged the hegemony of Piedmont, and British sympathy for this popular hero was something that he therefore needed to erode. In a moment of panic he talked of being ready to "exterminate to the last man" Garibaldi's volunteer army in Naples if it refused to submit.<sup>48</sup> Nor could he fully appreciate advice which came from Britain that the need for consensus required him "to treat Garibaldi as an ally and not as an enemy". Palmerston made the interesting suggestion that Garibaldi, who was a seaman before he became a soldier, be put in charge of the Italian fleet.<sup>49</sup> But Cavour stood firm against any concession to this popular hero except an offer of money that was rejected with disdain. As a loyal Piedmontese, Cavour also insisted that his own region of northern Italy must "annex" the rest of the peninsula – rather than accept Garibaldi's carefully-worded plebiscites in Sicily and Naples that voted to join a new Kingdom of Italy as equal partners. This was yet another calculated risk, which would please the Piedmontese even if it

47. 23 Aug. 1860, Abraham Tourte quoting Cavour, *Swiss Archives* Bern, E. 2300/1; Luigi Chiala, *La Politica Segreta di Napoleone III e di Cavour in Italia e in Ungheria*, Turin, 1895, 158; *Carteggi di Cavour: La Liberazione del Mezzogiorno*, Bologna, 1954, 5/516–20.

48. *La Liberazione del Mezzogiorno*, 3.64 (8 Oct. 1860, Cavour to Farini).

49. *Cavour e l'Inghilterra*, 3/159 (17 Nov. 1860).

offended other Italians and damaged British confidence in his good sense.

Not surprisingly there was much impatience in London as the fear of Cavour's secret belligerence was compounded by this uncompromising attitude to the man who had just conquered half of Italy for King Victor Emanuel. Queen Victoria's view was that "if we are a little determined with this really bad, unscrupulous Sardinian government and show them that we will not encourage or countenance further piratical and filibustering proceedings, they will desist, the queen doubts not".<sup>50</sup> Palmerston could nevertheless reply with confidence that a united Italy would now help to safeguard British interests and the peace of Europe: "the stronger that kingdom becomes, the better able it will be to resist political coercion". Though the British prime minister hoped that Rome would join the rest of Italy in the next few months, he also hoped that Florence not Rome would become the national capital since traditions inherited from the papal administration would otherwise be a corrupting influence and hard to eradicate. Presciently his foreign minister realised that "it will be difficult to amalgamate the southern Italians: the northerners must lead them and they may not like to be led".<sup>51</sup> Here was another problem that Cavour, and perhaps Cavour alone, might have been able to resolve once he realised that his dream of another war had to be postponed. But British hopes were dashed: the acquisition of Venice and Rome, like the pacification of the south, were left over for a future generation to achieve.

Britain never engaged in war to help the risorgimento, unlike Napoleon III and Bismarck who both used it effectively as an instrument in their own national policy. But the sympathy and influential support she contributed were necessary components in the way that events developed, and any advice given was never peremptory or intrusive. Cavour, like Crispi later, hoped for even more positive and practical help from the British and was resentful when it was not forthcoming. Yet Britain alone in Europe was never seriously regarded as a likely enemy of the new united Italy. Until

50. 11 Dec. 1860, Queen Victoria to Russell, *Russell Papers*, 30/22/14.

51. 10 Jan. 1861, Palmerston to Queen Victoria, *The Letters of Queen Victoria 1837-1861*, ed. C.A. Benson and Viscount Esher, London, 1908, 3/545-46; 11 Oct. 1860, Russell to Hudson, *Russell Papers*, 30/22/109.

Mussolini arrived on the scene sixty years later, all Italian foreign ministers could take for granted that there existed a "special relationship" in the Mediterranean that enabled them under British naval protection to act as a Great Power on the mainland of Europe; a fact which enormously simplified the difficulties and dangers and expense of their foreign policy.

Further minor resentment in this later period was sometimes directed against British historians of the risorgimento. Trevelyan and Bolton King did more than any Italian writers to show the outside world that the making of a united Italy had been heroic, liberal and idealistic, but the Italian prime minister Luzzatti took offence and thought that British admiration fell short of what was required. Luzzatti wrote to the *Times* in 1911 to demand a public apology for a far from unsympathetic account in the Cambridge Modern History and for what he called "an anthology of malevolent lies" by Dr G.P. Gooch. An article in the authoritative *Corriere della Sera* was even headed "The University of Cambridge against Italy". When the next Italian premier was asked to open the archives to put the record straight, he felt it prudent to reply that the time had not yet come to let 'beautiful legends' be discredited by historical criticism.<sup>52</sup> Legends, it is true, may be sometimes useful in boosting national morale, but they can be dangerous as an instrument of national policy. Fascist historiography could sometimes get away with pretending that the British deserved punishment for having opposed the risorgimento for being a challenge to their imperial interests. Britain was even said by fascist historians to have cruelly persecuted Mazzini, even though England alone in Europe gave hospitality to this outlawed refugee. The British government was also said to have tried to sabotage Garibaldi's expedition to Sicily and then brought Cavour to an early grave by giving insufficient help to the more conservative patriots. Today, now that the archives are open, we are nearer the truth, and no one has lost by it.

52. *The Times*, 16 and 18 Nov. 1911; *Corriere della Sera*, 26 Oct. and 7 Nov. 1911; Giolitti in the Italian Senate: *discussioni* for 4 June 1912,