

Italian unification

Italy in 1850. At the end of the first half of the nineteenth century Italy remained very much the same as it had been in 1815. Only the north-western region had been touched by industrialism; and politically the country was still divided into eight states, of which Piedmont-Sardinia alone had a constitution. The liberalism of this constitution was exceedingly thin. The monarch appointed the council of ministers and the upper house, and only one person in every 100 voted to elect the lower house. Nevertheless, as we have already learned, this tiny gleam of liberalism was "the light on the hill" for Italian liberals and democrats. Victor Emmanuel II, the king of Piedmont-Sardinia, also aroused patriotic hopes. There were contradictory facets to his character. He was bluff, hearty, simple in habits, cunning in politics, unsuccessful as a military leader and morally unstable. None, however, doubted his patriotism, his abiding love of the soil that had given him birth. Nationalists saw in him the most likely leader of the *Risorgimento*—the resurrection of the ancient glories of Italy and her liberation from the Austrian yoke. They felt that they could not rely upon the Pope as a national leader because Italian unification would involve some loss of his temporal power, and moreover, his position as head of a universal Church inclined him towards conservatism. The King of Naples and Sicily, being the ruler of an extensive state, was in a position to lead a national movement, but he was a bitter reactionary. Joseph Mazzini and the republicans, having failed dismally in 1848-49, were generally regarded as impractical and stood low in prestige.

Count Cavour (1810-61)

In November, 1852, Victor Emmanuel appointed Count Camillo di Cavour as his prime minister. Cavour, a Piedmontese aristocrat, retained office until 1859 and was prime minister again from 1860 until his death the following year. Short and stocky, near-sighted and bourgeois in appearance, Cavour at first gave no sign of the leading part he was to play in Italian unification. He had, however, embraced liberal principles and shown a hatred of both absolutism and clericalism. He was also convinced of the superior merits of constitutional monarchy as opposed to republicanism. Determined to keep abreast of modern ideas, he had become a keen student of finance and also of scientific agriculture, which he practised on his father's estates. The liberal ideas expressed by him in *Il Risorgimento*, a newspaper he had founded, were instrumental in persuading Charles Albert to grant a constitution in 1848 and to make war on Austria.

As prime minister, Cavour was an excellent organiser and administrator. Convinced that the future of Piedmont-Sardinia lay in a sound economy and liberal reforms, he made commercial treaties with France, England and Belgium and introduced a large measure of free trade. Banks and other credit institutions were encouraged, and education was extended. In every possible way, he assisted the growth of the Economic Revolution in Italy. Factories were opened, railways built, roads improved, and, to stimulate steam navigation, harbours were developed. Genoa, the present terminal of the Italo-Australian shipping route, was converted into a fine modern port. In 1855, despite the Pope's

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protests, Cavour dissolved all religious orders not connected with preaching, teaching, or charitable works.

It was now Cavour's policy to reduce Papal influence, for he had come to believe firmly that "Piedmont, gathering to itself all the living forces of Italy, would soon be in a position to lead our mother-country to the high destiny to which she is called". The Papacy, he feared, would be an obstacle to the achievement of that destiny. As a practical statesman, Cavour also realised that Italian unification could not be achieved until after Austria had been defeated in a war in which Piedmont-Sardinia would need foreign assistance.

Cavour's foreign policy was already working towards obtaining the necessary help. His commercial policy had gained British approval, and British newspapers represented him as an enlightened statesman. But Cavour knew that he could scarcely expect British participation in a war against Austria. He desired active help from France.

The Crimean War (1854-56)

In the hope of effecting a French alliance, Cavour sent troops to assist Britain and France against Russia in the Crimean War. Russia, long desirous of gaining the Dardanelles and access to the Mediterranean, had declared war on Turkey, using as a pretext atrocities committed on Christians within the Turkish Empire. The British government, wishing to maintain the territorial integrity of Turkey and to protect Britain's lines of communication with her Indian Empire, joined forces with Napoleon III to thwart Russian ambitions. So began the Crimean War, the first international conflict since 1815. Beyond a desire to emulate his famous uncle and gain military glory, Napoleon III had no reason for entering the war, but Cavour, always the opportunist, saw a chance of winning French favour. After overcoming considerable opposition in the Piedmontese parliament, he dispatched 15,000 men to the Crimea in 1855.

At first the war proved unpopular, for cholera ravaged the Piedmontese forces, but when they gained a dashing victory, public opinion changed completely. The flame of nationalism burned more brightly than ever before; and Piedmont-Sardinia had gained the enduring friendship of Napoleon III in her struggle against Austria. So it has been said that "Italy was created out of the mud of Crimea".

Cavour, who had been strengthening Piedmont-Sardinia's army and navy since 1852, next negotiated the secret Pact of Plombières with Napoleon III in 1859 promising him Savoy and possibly Nice in return for helping the Piedmontese to free Lombardy and Venetia.

The Italian War of Liberation (1859)

Cavour then provoked the Austrians into declaring war and, with French help, defeated them in bloody battles at Magenta and Solferino. Nationalist enthusiasm was now high in Italy. Inspired by Piedmont's campaign, Modena, Parma and Tuscany drove out their rulers and, together with Romagna, set up provisional governments.

Napoleon III had eagerly sought war with Austria because he wanted to emulate his uncle's famous deeds in northern Italy. Suddenly, however, he realised that he was helping to create a strong Italian kingdom, comprising

central as well as northern Italy, on his south-eastern border. Moreover, the war was costly; French Catholics opposed it because of its threat to the temporal power of the Papacy, and Napoleon III's suspicions were aroused by Prussian military activity along his eastern frontier. So, to the dismay of the Italians, he suddenly made an armistice with the Austrians at Villafranca.

Deserted by his ally, Victor Emmanuel had to accept the armistice, Cavour resigned, and, by the Peace of Zürich, Piedmont received Lombardy, but Austria retained Venetia. The former rulers were to be restored in central Italy, and provision was made for a confederation of the Italian states under the Papacy.

However, Parma, Modena, Tuscany and Romagna refused to return to their former status or to entertain the Papal confederation plan. At plebiscites they voted for union with Piedmont-Sardinia. Lord Palmerston, the British prime minister, declared that Britain would not countenance the restoration of despotism in Italy, and Cavour, who had returned to office, renewed his offer of Savoy and Nice to France, if Napoleon III would support the annexation of the four central Italian states by Piedmont-Sardinia. To this the emperor agreed, and representatives of Parma, Modena, Tuscany and Romagna attended the next meeting of the Turin parliament.

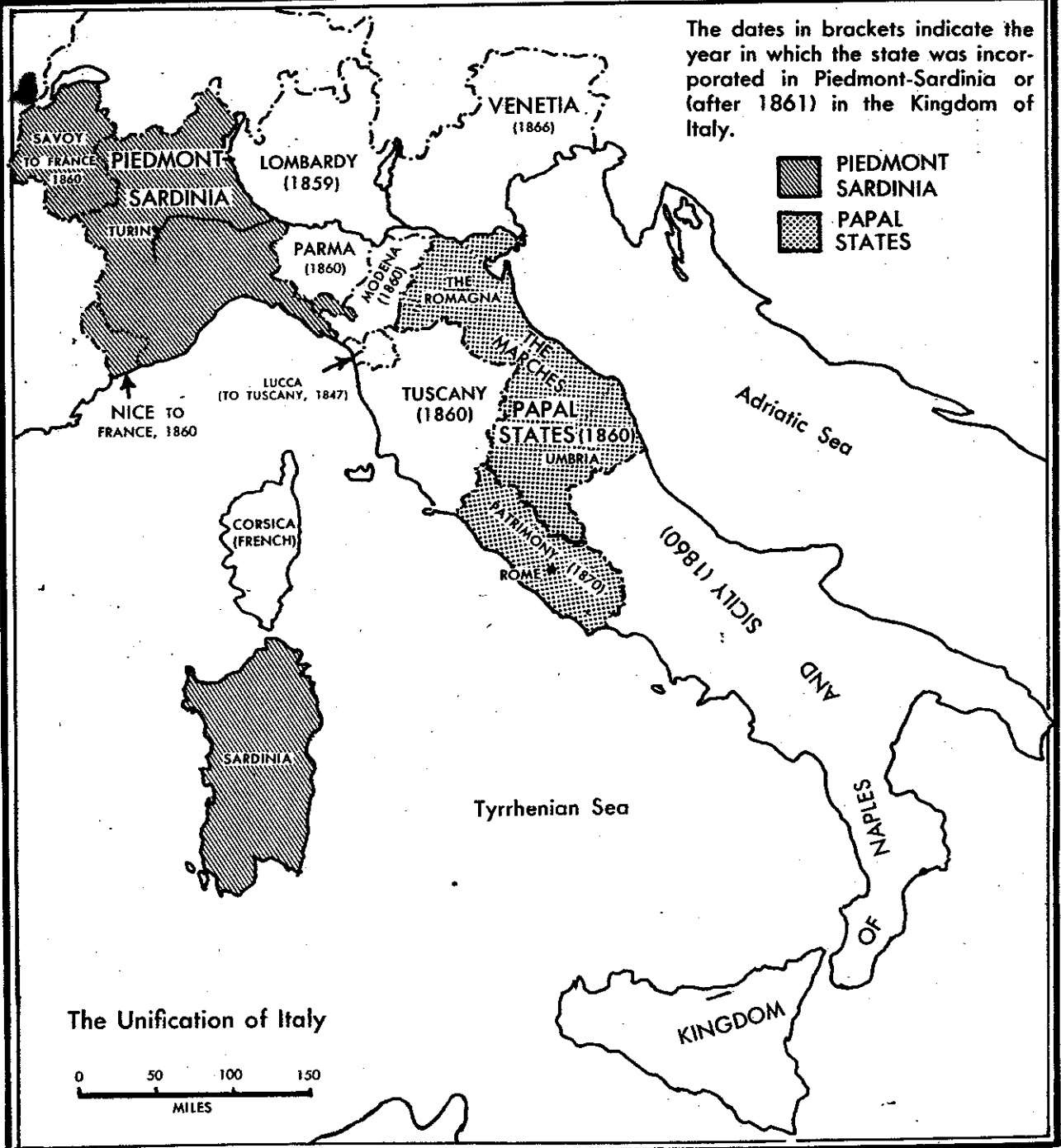
The conquest of Naples and Sicily

The next step in the unification of Italy was taken by Giuseppe Garibaldi, a native of Nice, a freebooter, and a romantic, picturesque figure, who had fought heroically in defence of Mazzini's Roman republic and during the War of Liberation. When extremist Sicilian followers of Mazzini revolted against their king, Francis II, in 1860, Garibaldi sailed to their aid with a thousand red-shirted volunteers. It seemed a foolhardy escapade, but, to the amazement of all, he quickly conquered Sicily. When, flushed with victory, he crossed to the mainland, the whole fabric of Bourbon rule collapsed almost overnight.

Cavour, who had advised Garibaldi not to undertake the Sicilian campaign, now found himself in a dilemma. He could not afford to offend Garibaldi, whose spectacular success had aroused great enthusiasm in Italy; but, on the other hand, if Garibaldi continued his northward march and captured Rome, France and Austria might intervene to save the Papal States, and even undo the whole work of unification. In the impasse, Cavour acted promptly. Under the plea that he was protecting the Pope, he sent troops to occupy the Marches and Umbria.

The Piedmontese army then advanced southward into Neapolitan territory. This put pressure on Garibaldi to yield his conquered territory to Piedmont-Sardinia. When plebiscites were held in October, 1860, and the Neapolitans and Sicilians voted for incorporation in a united Italy, Garibaldi handed over his newly-won possessions to Victor Emmanuel and retired to his home on the island of Caprera. Much has been made of his noble self-abnegation. Actually, no other course was left to him. Had he resisted, his *Thousand Redshirts* would have been overthrown by Cavour's superior forces.

The first Italian parliament met at Turin in March, 1861, and proclaimed the Kingdom of Italy. Victor Emmanuel retained the title Victor Emmanuel II to show that Italy was not a new state but had grown out of the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia.



• **Venetia and Rome.** Two important Italian states—the Patrimony of St. Peter and Paul (containing Rome) and Venetia—still remained outside the Italian kingdom.

Italy gained Venetia in 1866 as a reward for helping Prussia in the Austro-Prussian War.

Rome and the Patrimony fell to Italy in 1870 when Napoleon III, hard pressed in the Franco-Prussian War, was forced to withdraw the French regiment he had maintained in the Holy City since the days of Mazzini's republic. Rome now became the capital of Italy.

Effect on the Papacy. The Pope's temporal power virtually disappeared with the incorporation of the Papal States in the Italian kingdom. Pius IX protested against the loss of his territories, refused to recognise the Italian government, and imprisoned himself in Vatican City, a small area in Rome, over which he ruled as an independent sovereign. His policy was followed by his successors

until 1929, when Pope Pius XI and Benito Mussolini made a concordat under which the Papacy recognised the Kingdom of Italy.

“Italia Irredenta”. Even the acquisition of Rome did not bring all Italians under the Italian flag. The Trentino and the district around Trieste, though mainly peopled by Italians, remained under Austrian rule and became known as *Italia Irredenta* (“Unredeemed Italy”). Ardent nationalists also regarded Corsica (ruled by France), Malta (ruled by Britain), Savoy and Nice as Italian territory. These four places, like the Trentino and Trieste, were to become future danger-spots.

The unification of Germany

The political unification of Germany was a further victory for nationalism, which had been strong among Germans ever since Prussia and the other German states had combined during the War of Liberation—not to seek foreign conquests, but to liberate themselves from a foreign conqueror. The spirit of German patriotism, then engendered, was immortalised in Ernst Arndt’s famous war song *What is the Fatherland?* and in the speeches and writings of Baron vom Stein, the man who had been largely responsible for the abolition of serfdom in Prussia, and who then organised the Prussian resistance to Napoleon I that culminated in victory at Leipzig. His attitude was summed up in the statement: “I know no fatherland but Germany”.

The hopes of the nationalists were dashed by the creation of the German Confederation in 1815. Thereafter Metternich’s influence drove nationalism underground, but failed to destroy it because it continually gathered inspiration from the *Zollverein*, which taught the German people the value of unity.

Yet the failure of the revolutions in 1848-49 showed that a united nation could not be achieved by a popular movement while Germany was broken up into kingdoms, principalities, duchies, counties, bishoprics and free towns, each with its own laws, court and army, and each with an independent ruler to whom the idea of political unity was anathema.

Prussia’s position. Prussia was the natural pivot for a unification movement, but she refused to submerge herself in a German nation. This attitude was summed up by one Prussian statesman, who said: “Prussia will rule Germany: she will not serve Germany”.

In 1861 Frederick William IV died and was succeeded by his brother William I, an ambitious, industrious and conscientious king, who believed firmly in absolutism and militarism. He was determined to exalt Prussia to undisputed German leadership and to force union upon the various states. With this end in view, he began to strengthen his armed forces. His policy met with opposition from the Prussian liberals, who wanted to unite Germany by spreading nationalist ideas and creating patriotism. Commanding a majority in parliament, they refused to sanction his military expenditure.

After some hesitation William I called in Prince Otto von Bismarck as his prime minister. Bismarck, a man of huge stature and military bearing, was a member of the *Junkers*,* an aristocrat who detested all liberal and democratic

**Junker*: (German, “yung herr”) young German noble; member of exclusive aristocratic party in Prussia.