



Giuseppe Mazzini is often called the "soul" or the "heart" of Italy's unification. Why is that?

If we step back to the mid-nineteenth century, to see one of the "Fathers of the Fatherland" in his own time, we can get a better sense of who he was (and how people viewed him).

In the spring of 1849, the *Illustrated London News* (ILN) published [a story about Mazzini](#). Let's start with the end of that story, where we find a description of his appearance:

Mazzini is of middle height, and extremely thin. There is an unspeakably noble expression in his forehead and eyes. All who were fortunate enough to know him in England, loved him most enthusiastically. (London Illustrated News, 19 May 1849, at page 312.)

What was Mazzini doing in England? Why was he there?

After the failure of the Savoy expedition, the Swiss Government, unworthily yielding to the demands of Austria and other powers, inhospitably expelled Mazzini from their territory; and it was then that he betook himself to England.

Here he resided upwards of thirteen years, always looking forward to the day when Italy should summon her children to her defence [defense]. He spent much time and money in carrying on a gratuitous [free] school for the instruction of poor Italians in the metropolis [of London], which was the means of effecting great good. He also wrote several periodicals, English and foreign, on politics, literature, and art. (ILN, 19 May 1849, at page 312.)

In other words ... Mazzini was biding his time until the situation in Italy became ripe for revolution against the foreign powers dominating the Italian peninsula.

The time was ripe in 1848. Revolutions throughout Europe, including France, caused Mazzini to believe similar uprisings could be effective against foreign powers in Italy. The *News'* article continues:

When the French revolution of February, 1848, broke out, Mazzini conceived that Paris was the proper focus of action, and, accordingly, he went there. He returned to England for a short time, and then Lombardy having risen against the Austrians, he repaired [went] to Milan, where he conducted the paper L'Italia del Popolo [Italy of the People]. (ILN, 19 May 1849, at page 312.)

Meanwhile ... the King of Sardinia-Piedmont was [Charles Albert](#). Father of Victor Emmanuel II—who would play a key role in Italy's unification when he became king of Sardinia-Piedmont—Charles Albert was pro-French and anti-Austrian. Mazzini didn't really trust him (as the *News'* article tells us):

Being persuaded of the faithlessness of Charles Albert, he could not join the King's admirers.

He [Mazzini] strongly advocated the [revolutionary] war [against Austria]; and when Charles Albert turned his back on Milan [which is located in Lombardy, then controlled by Austria], and the people [in Lombardy], then convinced of his [Charles Albert's] treachery too, wished to make Mazzini dictator, and to entrust the defence of the city to him, the Austrians were already at the gates, and nothing remained for the inhabitants but fight. (ILN, 19 May 1849, at page 312.)

The people did fight, but their efforts—at this point in the unification process—did not achieve the desired result. Mazzini had to seek refuge elsewhere:

Mazzini took refuge in the canton of Ticino, in Switzerland thence, shortly after the expedition into the Val d'Intelir, he was again expelled. (ILN, 19 May 1849, at page 312.)

Still convinced that revolution in 1848 could be effective somewhere in Italy, Mazzini led a group of like-minded guerillas into Rome. He, and they, were successful ... at least for a time (from November of 1848 to early July of 1849). The *Illustrated London News* article was printed during that time frame:

Rome had now declared itself a republic, and Mazzini was at once elected deputy in the Constituent Assembly for the town of Leghorn [i.e., the port city of Livorno on the Ligurian Sea in western Tuscany], where he landed, and was received with acclamations. (ILN, 19 May 1849, at page 312.)

With Rome seemingly secured as a Republic in its own right, Mazzini tried to convince the people of Tuscany to join with Rome (like Piedmont would join with Sardinia). His efforts to get Tuscany to join with Rome did not work:

After spending some time at Florence, in attempting to effect the fusion of Tuscany and Rome, he at length repaired to Rome.

From that moment he has been the leading spirit of the Roman Republic, and is now one of the Triumvirate [the men leading the Roman Republic]. Our last accounts present him animating the people to resist the force of General Oudinot [a French general, sent by Napoleon III of France, to oust Mazzini and his colleagues from Rome]. (ILN, 19 May 1849, at page 312.)

As the *News'* article points-out, Mazzini had the interests of the Italian people in mind as he tried to unify the peninsula:

Mazzini's ideas are conveyed in the motto of the Roman Republic, "Dio et il popolo" ("God and the people"). (ILN, 19 May 1849, at page 312.)

Within two months of the date of this article, however, General Oudinot was successful in ousting Mazzini.

This ended the Roman Republic and—for the next several decades—Rome and the Pope (then Pius IX) were protected by the French.

These 1849 setbacks, however, did not end the efforts of Italians—like Mazzini—who still believed that Italy should be unified.

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