

**CAVOUR**

by Denis Mack Smith  
Knopf, 1985  
294 pp. \$18.95

Of the three great architects of Italy's 1860 unification—Giuseppe Garibaldi, Giuseppe Mazzini, and Camille de Cavour—Cavour was perhaps the most unlikely. A cautious liberal who believed economic unity should precede political nationhood, he rarely left his native Piedmont (the northern Italian state that belonged to the Kingdom of Sardinia) and spoke better French than Italian. Mack Smith, an Oxford historian, chronicles the life of this unlikely national hero. Born into an aristocratic family in 1810, Cavour received a military education ill-suited to his boisterous, arrogant nature. At 14, he secured a coveted position as page to a prince, only to lose it by rejecting the page's uniform as "livery." After spending his youth among gamblers and suspected socialists, he became the mayor of a small Piedmontese village in 1832. He also began to write on economic matters, espousing the views of 17th- and 18th-century English liberals. In the wake of the 1848 revolutions he took over chief editorship of the progressive newspaper *Il Risorgimento*. And in 1852, after serving four years in Piedmont's parliament, he succeeded the right-wing Massimo d'Azeglio as prime minister. Balancing conservative and liberal factions, Cavour pushed through such "radical" measures as free-market reforms and the building of railroads. To reduce foreign meddling in Italy, he plotted with France's Napoleon III to provoke a secret European war against Austria, an obtrusive neighbor. The plot failed. Cavour fell into a deep depression and was caught off guard when Garibaldi's army (the "Thousand") conquered Sicily in May 1860. Swallowing his disdain for Garibaldi's revolutionary rhetoric, Cavour promptly sent an army across the papal states to help him unite Italy. Cavour succumbed to gout and malaria in 1861 shortly after the creation of the Kingdom of Italy, but he left his mark on the new nation. Parliamentary government, separation of church and state, and even the location of the capital in Rome were all largely the work of the man whom England's *Economist* described at his death as the "foremost statesman in Europe."