Panizzi, Gladstone, Garibaldi and the Neapolitan Prisoners

Denis V. Reidy

Antonio Genesio Maria Panizzi first came to work in the Department of Printed Books at the Library of the British Museum in the capacity of an Extra-Assistant Librarian in 1831. He was reputedly one of the most accurate and prolific cataloguers in the Department of Printed Books and his talents did not go unrecognised: in 1856 he attained the highest post of Principal Librarian of the British Museum, a considerable achievement for a foreigner who had arrived in England in May 1823 as a political exile ‘with not quite a sovereign in his pocket, knowing no one, nor a word of the language’ as he once wrote of himself.1

Panizzi’s achievements while at the British Museum and especially when he was Keeper and eventually Principal Librarian — his celebrated 91 cataloguing rules, his enforcement of the Copyright Act, his concept of the Round Reading Room, to name but a few — are relatively well known. It is generally less well known, however, that during his career at the British Museum, Panizzi remained true to his strong patriotic feelings and Carbonaro leanings.2 He had, after all, paid a very high price for his commitment to seeing his beloved native Italy freed from foreign invaders and finally unified — he had had to flee his home in the Duchy of Modena, then under the rule of the tyrannical Hapsburg Duke Francis IV, in order to avoid arrest and certain execution, was condemned to death in absentia, had had all his property confiscated and was even hanged in effigy — yet he still remained faithful to the cause. He worked tirelessly behind the scenes endeavouring to influence politicians, particularly Gladstone, whom he counted as a personal friend, and to keep the Italian Question on the political agenda. Indeed for many years during his very eventful life in London, Panizzi acted as Cavour’s unofficial Ambassador.

Even as early as the 1830s Panizzi had not shied away from his patriotic principles. In his native Brescello he had led a dangerous double life acting as a local council official (first as a town clerk and later as a school inspector) by day, and by night, enrolling other patriotic sympathizers into the Sublimi Maestri Perfetti, a secret society which had links to the Carbonari movement. Panizzi’s dangerous double life could not continue indefinitely. His subversive activities were eventually brought to the attention of Duke Francis’s secret police, but Panizzi was forewarned of his imminent arrest and was able to cross the river Po and flee Italy for the safety of Switzerland, staying at nearby Lugano. Here he published his blistering attack against Francis IV and his corrupt and tyrannical regime in his celebrated Dei processi e delle sentenze contro gli imputati di Lesa Maestà e di aderenza alle sette proscritte negli Stati di Modena …, published under the false imprint of Madrid, Torres, 1823. Panizzi’s personal copy with his manuscript annotations is held in the British Library at pressmark C.44.d.1. (In later life Panizzi was extremely embarrassed by his book, considering it a ‘faute de jeuness’ and proceeded to buy up every single copy of the work he could locate. Consequently very few copies have survived.)

Despite becoming a naturalized Englishman as early as 1832, Panizzi endeavoured to continue to assist political exiles, particularly Italian political exiles, as much as he could. The Italian contingent of political exiles in England, particularly in London, was fairly

2 For Panizzi’s political life, see Constance Brooks, Antonio Panizzi, Scholar and Patriot (Manchester, 1931).
numerous, reflecting the numbers who had had to flee a country which had been for many years under Austrian and French rule in the North and under Bourbon rule in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies — a country which had been dismissed by Metternich as a mere ‘geographical expression’. The conditions of political exiles in London, especially the Italian political exiles, who included Ugo Foscolo, the greatest poet of his generation, Santorre di Santa Rosa, Gabriele Rossetti, father of Dante Gabriele and Christina Rossetti, and later the patriot Giuseppe Mazzini, to name but a few of the more celebrated Italian exiles, began to take a distinct turn for the worse in 1844.

In that year it was brought to Panizzi’s attention that the Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen, a well-meaning man of high moral principle, had been asked by Metternich to assist in upholding the settlement of Europe which had been established by the Congress of Vienna; the latter suggested to Aberdeen that the new nationalism and the revolutionary activities of political hotheads, especially Mazzini and his like, should be discouraged. Aberdeen’s assistance consisted in instructing the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham, to order the British Post Office to intercept and open the mail of foreign political exiles living in England, especially Mazzini, addressed to known patriots in Italy (fig. 1). The contents of their correspondence were then passed on via the Austrian Embassy in London to the Austrian authorities in Italy, and thence to the authorities in the Kingdom of Naples, ruled by the ruthless and tyrannical King Ferdinand II who had earned the nickname ‘Re Bomba’. Panizzi and many of his contemporaries were convinced that the transfer of this vital information about the Italian revolutionaries had forewarned the Neapolitan authorities of a planned insurrection and had led directly to the capture, arrest and eventual execution of two of Italy’s most loyal patriots, the Bandiera brothers Attilio and Emilio in 1844. Like many of his contemporaries Panizzi was convinced that these executions and others had been a direct consequence of Aberdeen’s and Graham’s policy, which he considered deceitful, bordering on treachery, and an infringement of basic human rights.

Panizzi, who was probably convinced that his own letters to fellow patriots in Italy were also being intercepted and opened, alerted Mazzini, who, in turn, contacted Thomas Duncombe, the radical MP for Finsbury, who was sympathetic to Italian and Hungarian refugees. Duncombe raised the matter in the House of Commons. The disclosure caused a public outcry and prompted the appointment of Secret Committees of Inquiry in the House of Lords as well as in the Commons which eventually produced their Reports. Panizzi was not satisfied with the conclusions of these Reports and did not let the matter rest there. He launched into print with an article entitled ‘Post Office Espionage’, published in the North British Review in November 1844. In it Panizzi rounded on Graham and by implication Aberdeen and the members of the government he considered to be guilty of collusion with tyrannical and despotic enemies. He pointed out that Mazzini had committed no offence against English law and had not plotted ‘any wicked design against England’ (p. 269) — Panizzi, we should recall, held a degree in Law from the University of Parma and was well qualified to write on the subject. In his view Aberdeen and his government had stooped to become informers for the Austrian and the Neapolitan authorities and had aided in the capture, summary trial and execution of Italian patriots. Panizzi, who had suffered tyranny, despotism and betrayal at first hand, condemned a British government which, to its eternal shame, had ‘volunteered its services as a spy to the King of Naples’ (p. 295). Once the situation was revealed, satirical cartoons abounded in the British press, the most mordant being perhaps the one which appeared in Punch entitled ‘The Post-Office Peep-Show’ which portrayed dubious foreign figures in military or diplomatic uniforms, queuing up to take a peep at letters in a miniature, model ‘theatre’ of the British Post Office in London, on payment of a penny (fig. 2).
Fig. 1. ‘Paul Pry at the Post Office’, *Punch or the London Charivari*, vol. vii (1844), p. 7, showing Sir James Graham. BL, PP. 5270.
The matter did not rest there. Panizzi and Gladstone were good friends – Panizzi had first known Gladstone’s godfather, William Ewart, a wealthy merchant, when Panizzi settled in Liverpool in the 1820s. Panizzi and Gladstone were probably introduced by Lord and Lady Holland in the 1840s after Panizzi had returned to London after his initial séjour in Liverpool, for the two men had much in common — a love of Italian literature and of course, politics. Panizzi had given public lectures on the Romantic poetry of the Italians at the Royal Institution at Liverpool, had later been appointed to the Chair of Italian at University College, London, and had been working on his editions of Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso and Boiardo’s Orlando Innamorato. Gladstone himself had a very good command of the Italian language and had a very sound knowledge of Italian literature: he even wrote verse of a high standard in Italian (see his Italian poem to Panizzi in Add. MS. 36723, fols 171–2) and a very competent essay on Leopardi, only the second piece of Leopardi criticism to be published in English. Gladstone also paid a visit to Alessandro Manzoni in 1838 and even visited Leopardi’s tomb in 1851. Panizzi and Gladstone also knew each other professionally because when Panizzi was appointed Keeper of Printed Books and later Principal Librarian of the British Museum, Gladstone was also a Trustee of the British Museum. During their numerous and lengthy conversations, Panizzi often spoke to Gladstone about the appalling conditions suffered by Italian political prisoners languishing in Re Bomba’s prisons in the Kingdom of Naples.

In the Winter of 1850-51 Panizzi persuaded Gladstone to visit Naples. Not only would the warmer climate of Naples be of benefit to the frail health of the Gladstones’ young daughter Mary, but it would also afford Gladstone the opportunity of seeing, at first hand, what was happening in King Ferdinand II’s Kingdom, especially in his prisons. Gladstone

---

was still very much a conservative politician at this time and as Morley writes, was ‘pretty strongly in favour of established governments, either at Naples or anywhere else’.

During their stay in Naples the Gladstones took a house at number 5 Chiatamone, just to the west of the naval harbour. Gladstone considered it his duty to investigate the circumstances under which political prisoners were arrested and imprisoned. Despite having been partially forewarned by Panizzi and having been prepared for the worst, he was very deeply shocked by what he saw. Unfortunate liberals and patriots such as Baron Carlo Poerio (1803-1867), Luigi Settembrini (1813-1876), Silvio Spaventa and just over sixty others, men of impeccable background and of faultless character, were arrested, often on trumped up charges, but more often than not without any form of trial, thrown into prison by Bomba’s secret police. The appalling conditions, especially the filth and squalor which these political prisoners had to endure in the ‘charnel house’ of the Vicaria and also the Nisida prisons in Naples, deeply shocked and moved Gladstone, who determined to publicize the conditions suffered by the dissidents.

On his return to London, Gladstone first tried an unofficial approach to Lord Aberdeen, now Prime Minister, but to no avail. In April 1851 Gladstone then wrote an open letter to Lord Aberdeen giving a balanced and objective account of what he had experienced in Naples, ably assisted by Panizzi. There is evidence that the two often met in Panizzi’s office at the British Museum and may well have drafted the letter jointly. Gladstone hoped that Aberdeen would use his very considerable influence to ameliorate, if not to remedy entirely, the desperate situation, but Aberdeen prevaricated. Gladstone at last realized that Aberdeen was not prepared to intervene and wrote to Panizzi: ‘I must absolutely print next week, unless I learn that something good has been done’.

Needless to say, nothing good was done and Gladstone’s celebrated pamphlet *A Letter to the Earl of Aberdeen on the State Prosecutions of the Neapolitan Government* was published on 11 July 1851, followed three days later by a second letter, in which Gladstone expanded on his first and explained the reasons for the delay in publishing, thereby causing further humiliation to Aberdeen and his government. Gladstone’s letters caused a sensation. *The Illustrated London News* sent reporters and artists to Naples to corroborate the evidence and within a fortnight the first illustrations of the Nisida and Vicaria prisons, the prisoners, and the conditions suffered by the prisoners appeared in the British press (fig. 3). Palmerston, who was then Foreign Secretary, was so delighted with Gladstone’s letters that he had copies printed at government expense and had them dispatched to every court in Europe, including, of course, that of Ferdinand II. The Neapolitan government issued a rebuttal entitled *Rassegna degli errori e delle fallacie pubblicate dal Sig. Gladstone in due lettere indiritte al Conte di Aberdeen sui processi politici nel Reame delle due Sicilie* in 1851, which Gladstone dismissed in *An Examination of the Official Reply of the Neapolitan Government* in 1852.

---

5 John Morley, Viscount Morley, *The Life of W. E. Gladstone* (London, 1903), vol. i, p. 389. Morley adds ‘The case had doubtless been opened to him by Panizzi […] a man of warm, large and free nature, an accomplished man of letters, and a victim of political persecution who came to this country a nearly starving refugee’.

6 Letter from Gladstone to Panizzi, BL, Add. MS. 36716, f. 272.
Panizzi and Gladstone had hoped that this scrutiny would put pressure on Bomba to free the political prisoners in Naples, but they were to be disillusioned. Panizzi’s personal frustration at this apparent stalemate can be seen in an unsigned article he wrote for the *Edinburgh Review* in October 1851 in the stirring exhortation: ‘We implore men of all parties, of all nations, of all creeds to raise a unanimous and unmistakable cry of abhorrence in the name of outraged humanity against deeds to which pagan tyranny, oriental despotism and African ferocity can hardly find a parallel’.

It was fortunate for Panizzi that his article was unsigned because he decided, somewhat naively, in the view of many, that if he were only granted an audience with Ferdinand II he could reason with him and point out the error of his ways. After many negotiations with Lord Shrewsbury, Louis Napoleon, Sir James Lacaita, the legal adviser to the British Legation, Sir William Temple, British Minister at Naples, George Fagan the attaché at Naples (father of Louis Fagan who was later to become Panizzi’s first biographer), and numerous others, Panizzi was eventually granted an audience with Ferdinand II in November 1851. He lectured Bomba on the cruel conditions found in his Kingdom and especially the deplorable privations suffered by the political prisoners languishing in his prisons. Bomba listened patiently for a little over twenty minutes and brought the audience to a sudden end with the phrase ‘Addio, terrible Panizzi!’ Before leaving Naples Panizzi visited the prisons in Naples and was appalled by what he saw. He returned to England and vowed to do something practical to resolve the lot of the Neapolitan political prisoners once and for all.

Once safely back in London, the first practical step Panizzi took was to adopt Raffaele Settembrini, the son of Luigi Settembrini, one of the principal political prisoners. With financial contributions from Gladstone and a firm promise from the latter that he would take care of Raffaele in the event of Panizzi’s sudden demise, Panizzi arranged for Raffaele to be sent to England. Raffaele later joined the merchant navy: his sea-faring skills were to prove useful in rescuing the Neapolitan prisoners. Further bad news came from Italy. Luigi Settembrini had been separated from his friend and fellow prisoner Baron Carlo Poerio and transferred along with other political prisoners to the impenetrable island prison of Santo
Panizzi, Gladstone, Garibaldi and the Neapolitan Prisoners

Stefano, located some forty miles offshore in the Gulf of Gaeta. Panizzi, however, managed to communicate with Settembrini in letters which Signora Settembrini smuggled to him in shoes, items of clothing and even in hemp, which was supplied to prisoners, during the rare visits she was permitted to make to her husband. As we shall soon see, some of Panizzi’s and Settembrini’s correspondence is preserved in the British Library.

A daring plan was conceived to rescue the prisoners from Santo Stefano, and Panizzi exploited his considerable network of friends and acquaintances both at home and abroad. In 1855 Panizzi decided to collect money from personal friends; Lord Holland contributed a large sum, rumoured to be in the region of £500, Mrs Gladstone donated £100 and collected a further £200 from friends and Panizzi himself borrowed £100, a sum he could scarcely afford. A further £500 was contributed from the British secret service fund via Gladstone who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and a sympathetic Palmerston who instructed Lord Clarendon, the Foreign Secretary, to draw a draft for the appropriate sum. Within the space of a few months the enormous sum of £1,500 was raised. Panizzi decided to purchase a fast steamer to sail to Santo Stefano and effect the rescue under cover of darkness. Through Sir James Hudson the British Minister at Turin, 7 Panizzi was put in touch with Agostino Bertani, physician and revolutionary, who in turn put him in contact with doubtless the most celebrated Italian revolutionary, Giuseppe Garibaldi. Garibaldi, by profession a merchant seaman, studied the plan, and considered it to be quite practicable. Garibaldi plotted a course for the ship which he suggested should approach the Island of Santo Stefano from an East-South-East direction and anchor off a deserted beach, close to the prison; on a moonless night the prisoners were to be transferred to the rescue ship in rowing boats. Garibaldi was optimistic of success.

Despite the outbreak of the Crimean war and its effect on the supply of shipping, Panizzi and his allies finally managed to locate and purchase a fast steamer, the Isle of Thanet, which had been recently launched on the Clyde. Panizzi planned the escape down to the last detail in clandestine letters to Luigi Settembrini, drafts of which survive in the British Library. Settembrini’s reply to Panizzi, dated 31 August 1855, part of which is reproduced here for the first time, gave last minute instructions and provided Panizzi with a sketch showing the precise location of his cell in the prison and confirmed the best route to approach Santo Stefano (figs 4–7). Settembrini wrote his letter using lemon juice in order to avoid detection. The chemical process used to reveal Settembrini’s invisible writing to Panizzi discoloured the letter and subsequently imparted a muddy brown hue to the paper. 8 In subsequent letters Panizzi describes and confirms to Settembrini how the ship was due to approach the Island prison from an Easterly to South Easterly direction, in the month of October just as Garibaldi had previously suggested. The prison is invariably referred to as the ‘Convent’ (‘convento’) and the prisoners are referred to as the ‘nuns’ (or sometimes as ‘monks’) as a form of code throughout Panizzi’s letter for security reasons. Apparently Panizzi’s fears were well founded because he was alerted by Sir William Temple, who was also involved in planning some of the final escape details in Naples, that Ferdinand II’s spies and secret police were everywhere. 9 It was agreed having reached one of the nearest points to the ‘convent’ the ship was to fly a white pennant at one of her mastheads. The pennant was then to be hauled down and after a few minutes raised again quickly — this was to be the agreed signal. The ship was then to sail off but was to return at midnight and anchor. After a light had been shone from land and after the password ‘Panizzi’ had been uttered by the escapers, rowing boats were then to be lowered, the prisoners taken on board and the Isle of Thanet was then to depart at approximately four in the morning. If the prisoners were not able to make it to the shore that night, the process was to be repeated on the following night.

7 Sir James Hudson, 1810–1885, formerly Private Secretary to William IV, was British Envoy to Turin, the first capital of Italy, from 1851 to 1863.
8 Add. MS. 36717, ff. 159–160, dated 31 August 1855. The sketch is on f. 160.
9 In Temple’s letter to Panizzi Add. MS. 36717, f. 177, he describes how he had been successful in bribing the guards and the owner of a small tavern through which the prisoners were forced to flee to effect their escape: the owner had to be handsomely paid off in order to keep his dogs chained up.
Fig. 4-7. Luigi Settembrini, letter to Panizzi, 31 Aug. 1855, with sketch showing the location of his cell in the prison of Santo Stefano, BL, Add. MS. 36717, ff. 159-160.  Fig. 4 Add. MS. 36717, f. 159r
Fig. 5. Add. MS. 36717, f. 159v
Fig. 7. Add. MS. 36717, f. 160v
Unfortunately there is often a slip between cup and lip. In October 1855 the Isle of Thanet, on route from Northern England to Naples via Genoa, lost one of her paddle wheels and had to put in at Hull to effect repairs, at a cost of £300. Far worse was to happen. When she eventually left Hull, she sank in a violent storm off the coast at Yarmouth on the morning of 26 October 1855, with the loss of three lives, all crew members. Being a stubborn man, Panizzi was not prepared to accept defeat and via Bertani contacted Garibaldi once more to start planning another escape. In February 1856 Garibaldi came to visit Panizzi at the British Museum and they planned a further rescue attempt. In the meantime things had taken a turn for the worse. England had broken off diplomatic relations with the Court of Naples because of an alleged insult to George Fagan in the Opera House at San Carlo. Gladstone and Cavour did not wish to risk a further diplomatic crisis, especially since considerable progress had been made in recent months in endeavouring to unite Italy under Piedmont. Bertani being a somewhat impractical, political hothead, put forward fairly ludicrous schemes to Panizzi to attack Santo Stefano by force and to free the political prisoners so that they could assist in further insurrections in Naples and the Papal States. Fortunately Panizzi resisted Bertani’s suggestions.

Panizzi wrote to Gladstone that he had every intention of returning ‘every farthing’ to those who had subscribed generously to the ‘Genoese venture’, and added ‘I mean to issue an habeas corpus and pledge my honour to pay one thousand pounds to whomsoever brings me the body of S [i.e. Settembrini]. I can do no more’. Fortunately hardly any of the subscribers to the doomed rescue fund, which still totalled a little over £1,000, asked for their money back and were quite content to entrust the money to Gladstone, who endeavoured to alleviate the conditions of the political prisoners and some of their relatives who had since fallen on very hard times.

Panizzi’s, Gladstone’s and Garibaldi’s patience, however, was soon to be rewarded. Later in 1856 Ferdinand II and his government, under pressure from recent events in Piedmont, Gladstone’s open letters to Lord Aberdeen and the breaking off of formal diplomatic ties with England, came to their senses. Wishing to curry favour with England and her allies, they offered the political prisoners the option of either suing publicly for pardon or being forced into exile in the Argentine. The majority of the prisoners were happy to settle for exile, however, Panizzi, ever mistrustful of Bomba and fearing that they would probably be imprisoned by him once more on reaching South America, persuaded them to sue for pardon. Things dragged on for a further two years and in December 1858, Ferdinand’s government issued a decree to the prisoners offering them the option to emigrate to the Argentine or to remain in prison indefinitely. All the prisoners, with the exception of Baron Carlo Poerio, were willing to accept this offer but since the offer was not accepted unanimously, it was cruelly withdrawn. However, barely a month later, on 6 January 1859, the Neapolitan authorities issued a second decree which allowed 66 of the political prisoners which included both Settembrini and Poerio, to go into exile, not to the Argentine but to the much safer and more attractive haven of New York. This offer was unanimously accepted to everyone’s joy. Palmerston was quick to point out to Panizzi that the prisoners were not

---

10 The brief article which appeared in The Times (29 October 1855), p. 10, reads as follows:~ ‘SHIP NEWS […]
London, Oct. 27. –The weather is now more settled. The late gale appears to have been very general, and to have been experienced within a considerable circle.
Yarmouth, Oct. 26. –The steamer Isle of Thanet, of London, from Hull for Genoa, hoisted a signal for assistance this morning, her machinery having broken down, and the vessel making much water. A steam tug hence went off and took her in tow from a dangerous position, but she soon afterwards went down, with three of the crew’.

I am very much indebted to my colleague Jacqueline Pitcher of the Newspaper Library at Colindale, for her kind assistance in locating this article.

11 Add. MS. 44274, f. 157.
bound to stay in New York and could obtain their liberty ‘by two voyages across the Atlantic’.\(^{12}\) Panizzi and others were still fearful about the reception the prisoners would be given by the United States government because the Neapolitan authorities had not, needless to say, deigned to consult the Americans about the prisoners or their future. Panizzi had to work unstintingly on their behalf in order to smooth their arrival and hopefully brief sojourn in New York.

The matter did not stop there. The 66 political prisoners left Naples in the *Stromboli* and although subject to prison rules and discipline, they were, in effect, little more than galley slaves. They reached Cadiz where they were transferred to an American ship, the *David Stewart*. On the second leg of their journey, shortly after leaving Cadiz, Settembrini’s son Raffaele, who had become an accomplished seaman since his adoption by Panizzi, took control of the ship along with other sympathizers and forced the captain to change his destination to New York and to put in at the nearest British port. At Cork the prisoners were given a tumultuous reception on 6 March.\(^{13}\) The imagination of the British public had been truly fired. At Bristol on 23 March another huge crowd gathered to greet them, including members of the press, especially the reporters and artists of *The Illustrated London News*.\(^{14}\) Such scenes featuring tumultuous crowds showing the spontaneous affection of the British public were unprecedented in England (fig. 8).

![Fig. 8. ‘Arrival of Neapolitan Exiles at Paddington Station’, *Illustrated London News*, 2 Apr. 1859, p. 321. BL., PP. 7611.](image-url)
A public subscription and The Lord Mayor’s Fund were soon proposed and set up to assist the Neapolitan prisoners which were contributed to very generously by members from all levels of British society and were administered by Panizzi. Charles Dickens no less wrote to Panizzi and in a generous gesture offered to write or assist in writing the biographies of the more prominent political prisoners so that the proceeds of the sale of these biographies could generate some extra income for them.

To ANTHONY PANIZZI, 14 MARCH 1859

TAVISTOCK HOUSE,
TAVISTOCK SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.
Monday Night March Fourteenth 1859

My Dear Panizzi,

If you should feel no delicacy in mentioning, or should see no objection to mentioning, to Signor Poerio or any of the wronged Neapolitan gentlemen to whom it is your happiness and honor to be a friend on their arrival in this country, an idea that has occurred to me: I should regard it as a great kindness in you if you would be my exponent. I think you will have no difficulty in believing that I would not, on any consideration, obtrude my name or projects upon any one of these noble souls, if there were any reason of the slightest kind against it. And if you see any such reason, I pray you instantly to banish my letter from your thoughts.

It seems to me probable that some narrative of their ten years’ suffering will, somehow or other, sooner or later, be by some of them laid before the English people. The just interest and indignation alive here, will (I suppose) elicit it. False narratives and garbled stories will, in any case, of a certainty get about. If the true history of the matter is to be told, I have that sympathy with them and respect for them which would—all other considerations apart—render it unspeakably gratifying to me to be the means of its diffusion. What I desire to lay before them, is simply this: If for my new successor to ‘Household Words’ a narrative of their ten years trial could be written, I would take any conceivable pains to have it rendered into English, and presented in the sincerest and best way to a very large and comprehensive audience. It should be published exactly as you might think best for them, and remunerated in any way that you might think generous and right. They want no mouthpiece and no introducer; but perhaps they might have no objection to be associated with an English writer who is possibly not unknown to them by some general reputation, and who certainly would be animated by a strong public and private respect for their honor, spirit, and unmerited misfortunes.

This is the whole matter. Assuming that such a thing is to be done, I long for the privilege of helping to do it. These gentlemen might consider it an independent means of earning money, and I should be delighted to pay the money.

In my absence from town, my friend and Sub-Editor, Mr Wills (to whom I had expressed my feeling on the subject), has seen—I think three—of the gentlemen together. But as I hear, returning home tonight, that they are in your good hands, and as nobody can be a better judge than you of anything that concerns them, I at once decide to write to you, and to take no other step whatever. Forgive me for the trouble I have occasioned you in the reading of this letter, and never think of it again if you think that by pursuing it you would cause them an instant’s uneasiness.

Believe me | Very faithfully Yours

CHARLES DICKENS

Panizzi and Gladstone had been extremely successful in bringing the plight of the Neapolitan prisoners to the attention of the British government, the British press and the British people, and had contributed considerably to keeping the Italian Question alive.

In July 1866 Panizzi eventually resigned from his post as Principal Librarian of the British Museum owing to his ill health, worn out by his tireless efforts on behalf of the British Museum and his unstinting contribution to the unification of his beloved Italy. In recognition of his life-long devotion to the Italian cause Panizzi was made a Senator of Italy on 12 March 1868 and in April 1868 was made a Commander of the Order of the Crown of Italy. Gladstone, despite Panizzi’s considerable reluctance, had him made a Knight Commander of the Bath in 1869. Gladstone, who visited Panizzi at his home in Bloomsbury Square right until Panizzi’s death on 8 April 1879 wrote of him ‘this very true, trusty, hearty friend [to this country]’.\textsuperscript{16} Cavour who had personal experience of the enormous contribution his unofficial Ambassador in London had made to the Italian cause, probably had the episode of the Neapolitan prisoners firmly in mind when he wrote the following tribute which was later inscribed on Panizzi’s monument in his native Brescello:

Se gli italiani conoscessero  
quali benemerenze ha il Panizzi  
verso la patria nessun cittadino  
sarebbe tenuto più alto  
nell’estimazione loro.

(If Italians were aware / of what an enormous debt is owed / by the fatherland to Panizzi no / other citizen would be held higher / in their esteem.)\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} Letter from Gladstone to the Duchess of Sutherland, 3 January 1868 (Morley, vol. ii, pp. 196-7).
\textsuperscript{17} I am extremely grateful to my colleagues at the British Library Lucy Evans, Phil Harris, Barry Taylor and Christopher Wright for having read my draft and for having made some useful suggestions to improve it.