

# “LA SOCIETÀ DELLE SCUOLE NORMALI DELLA VALLETTA” A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKDROP

Joe Debono

If for some sectors of life in Malta, the Napoleonic interlude was, in many ways, tragic, its effect on Maltese education was absolutely catastrophic. The University which Grandmaster Pinto had opened on 22nd November, 1769,<sup>1</sup> in the beautiful building that had previously housed the Jesuit-run ‘Collegium Melitense’<sup>2</sup>, was closed by Napoleon’s order of 18th June, 1798, to be replaced by ‘une *Ecole Centrale*’<sup>3</sup> modelled on those of Paris. Likewise, the Dominican University of ‘Sancta Maria Portus Salutis’, founded in 1729<sup>4</sup> – which, when still a ‘*Studium Particulare*’, had among its lecturers the celebrated Fr. Matteo Rispoli, a scholar acclaimed even in Paris<sup>5</sup> – had to close its doors, never to re-open them again in its pristine glory.

The same premature death also killed the ‘Endowed’ schools run jointly by the four ‘Universitates’ – or local communes – viz: those of Notabile;<sup>6</sup> Rabat, Gozo;<sup>7</sup> Vittoriosa;<sup>8</sup> and Valletta,<sup>9</sup> as well as by the Notabile Cathedral and the Rabat, Gozo, *Matrice*.

Besides, the several private schools – run mostly by ecclesiastics<sup>10</sup> – had, likewise, to shut their doors, because the many changes brought about by the French

1 Vella, Andrew P., “The University of Malta”, Malta, 1969, p. 37.

2 Idem. *passim*.

3 Scicluna, Hannibal P., “Documents Relating to the French Occupation of Malta in 1798-1800”, Malta, 1923, p. 99: “Il sera etabli ‘a Malte une *Ecole Centrale*, qui remplacera l’Universite’ et les autres chaires”.

4 Vella, Andrew P., “The University of S. Maria Portus Salutis”, in “Journal of the Faculty of Arts”, Vol. II, No. 2, 1962, p. 173.

5 Fsadni, M., “Id-Dumnikani fil-Belt 1569-1619”, Malta, 1971, pp. 107-108. Cfr: Idem, “Id-Dumnikani fir-Rabat u fil-Birgu sal-1620”, Malta, 1974, pp. 256-7.

6 Gatt, Guzè, “It-Taghlim f’Malta”, in “Is-Sebh”, 15th April, 1957, p. 4.

7 Idem, *op. cit.*, 21st October, 1957, No. 730, p. 6.

8 Vella, Andrew P., “The Tribunal of the Inquisition in Malta”, Malta, 1964, Appendix I, p. 45. Cfr: Gatt, Guze, “Is-Sebh”, May 29th, 1957, No. 668, p. 8.

9 Gatt, Guzè, “Is-Sebh”, No. 668, *loc. cit.*

10 Borg, Vincent, “Developments in Education outside the Jesuit ‘Collegium Melitense’” in “Melita Historica”, Vol. VI, No. 3, 1974, pp. 215-254.

government and the ensuing tumultuous times were not conducive to any form of schooling, even though Napoleon had drawn up an ambitious plan of opening 15 primary schools<sup>11</sup> to be, at least partly, maintained on the revenues of the suppressed convents of the religious orders.<sup>12</sup>

All this means that during the short but turbulent, two-year, French occupation of Malta, local education went into complete hibernation from which several institutions never woke up again, or found the aftermath uncongenial to their pristine status, and underwent a considerable metamorphosis. Nor was this pathetic situation remedied when the famished forces of General Vaubois were forced to surrender on 5th September, 1800<sup>13</sup>, and the British became ‘de facto’ masters of our islands.

Certainly, within a few weeks of the French departure, Captain Alexander, John Ball – appointed by the local *Consiglio Popolare* as chief of the Maltese, and confirmed in that role by the Bourbonic King of the Two Sicilies as his representative in Malta – began to take steps for the reopening of Pinto’s University. In fact, on 28th October, 1800, he appointed Canon Saverio Caruana – one of the leaders of the Maltese rebels – Rector<sup>14</sup>, and on 6th November the academic year was inaugurated<sup>15</sup>, although the first lectures were started a week later, on 13th November<sup>16</sup>. However, as no head can survive without a body, so the University could not really thrive and grow if it did not have a system of primary and secondary schools to feed it with new students.

Nevertheless, it took the local administration 38 long years to start opening free, government, elementary schools for the masses. But such was the general yearning for education that no less than 39 private, mostly fee-paying schools of all shapes, sizes and academic levels were opened between 1800 and 1840<sup>17</sup>. These included

11 Scicluna, Hannibal, P., op. cit., p. 100: “Il sera etabli dans les iles de Malte et du Gozzo quinze *ecoles primaires*.”

12 Id. *ibid*: “Il sera affectè au payement de chaque instituteur une portion suffisante des biens des couvents supprimes”.

13 Hardman, William, “A History of Malta during the period of the French and British occupations, 1798-1815”, London, 1909, p. 318.

14 Vella, Andrew P., “The University of Malta”, op. cit., p. 63. Cfr. Idem, p. 62: “... eundem Artium omnium Scientiarumque Inspectorem generalem ac Praesidem creaverat...”

15 Cassar Pullicino, J., “The Re-Opening of the University in 1800”, in “Journal of the Faculty of Arts”, Vol. I, No. 2, 1958, p. 148.

16 Id., *ibid*.

17 DeBono, Joseph A.J., “The Language Problem and Educational Policy in Malta: 1800-1975”, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1982, pp. 212-236.

day – and boarding – schools as well as academies and colleges. Their syllabi were equally varied, for besides the common 3R’s, some taught such subjects as: Universal and Church History, Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Chaldean, Syriac and German<sup>18</sup>; Embroidery<sup>19</sup>; various sciences, the Humanities and Belles Lettres<sup>20</sup>; as well as sewing and knitting.<sup>21</sup>

With but few exceptions, all these private schools were fee-paying, and students had to fork out rates ranging from 30 *tari* per student<sup>22</sup> to 1 dollar per month per student<sup>23</sup>. In the case of one boarding-school, at least, students had to pay 40 pounds sterling per annum<sup>24</sup>.

Such fees were astronomically exorbitant for the average Maltese family, if assessed against the socio-economic conditions of those days. By 1824, for example, the Committee of Charitable Institutions was handing out the considerable sum of £3,738 per annum in assistance of the poor<sup>25</sup>, and no less than “4,000 men had applied for charitable relief”<sup>26</sup>, this number almost trebling in the mid-thirties<sup>27</sup>. Those lucky enough to have a job were hardly better off, for wages were very low, even by Mediterranean standards, “...being only half what was paid in the Ionian Islands”.<sup>28</sup> In fact, between 1826 and 1842, a male agricultural labourer earned 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d to 8d per day for something like 15 hours of solid work, whereas his female counterpart was paid 3d to 4d. A child averaged 1d to 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d<sup>29</sup>. Even as late as the early decades of the present century, salaries and wages were still abysmally low. Certainly, the teachers who were responsible for the elementary education of the present writer had started their ‘noble’ career at the miserable sum of £4 per annum (i.e. 48 *scudi* per annum or 1 *tari* 12 *grains* i.e. less than 1c 1m per day).

18 “The Malta Government Gazette”, henceforth referred to as ‘M.G.G.’, No. 1025, Sep. 29th, 1830, p. 324.

19 M.G.G., No. 771, Dec. 28th, 1825, p. 392.

20 M.G.G., No. 1236, Sep. 24th, 1834, p. 321.

21 Mangion, Josephine, “The Period 1835 to 1850 in The History of Education of The Maltese Islands”, unpublished thesis, Malta University, 1953, p. 61.

22 M.G.G. No. 771, Dec. 28th, 1825, op. cit., loc. cit.

23 M.G.G. No. 1066, 6th July, 1831, p. 210. Vide: Appendix “A”, p. 21, for coins used during the British era.

24 “Il Mediterraneo”, No. 108, Aug. 19th, 1840, p. 1034.

25 Lee, Hilda I., “Malta 1813-1914, A Study in Constitutional and Strategic Development”, Progress Press, Malta, 1972, p. 53.

26 Owen, Charles, “The Maltese Islands”, Newton Abbot, 1969, p. 57.

27 Miede, Dominique, “Histoire de Malte”, Paris, 1840, Vol. I. p. 159.

28 Willis Dixon, C., “The Colonial Administration of Sir Thomas Maitland”, London, 1939, p. 156.

29 Price, Charles A., “Malta and the Maltese, A Study in Nineteenth Century Migration”, Melbourne, 1954, Appendix A, p. 215.

But quite apart from the abject poverty of the masses, another problem militated against the spread of popular education, namely the British presence in Malta, which was quite a unique experience fraught with moral dangers. For, since the departure of the Arabs in 1127 A.D.,<sup>30</sup> all the ruling powers had been Catholic and, therefore, posed no religious threat to local beliefs and practices. But the British were Protestant, and some were even aggressively so. The books they were likely to introduce on the island were, therefore, potentially tainted.

However, at first all went well, for the British residents in Malta up to 1830 never exceeded 700, excluding the garrison<sup>31</sup>. So, they could use “the chapel in the Governor’s Palace at Valletta as their place of worship”<sup>32</sup>. When their number increased, rumours began to spread that St. John’s co-cathedral might be converted into a Protestant church<sup>33</sup>.

Furthermore, quite an overt attempt at proselytizing the Maltese was made as early as 1809, when the directors of the London Missionary Society despatched a young German missionary, by the name of Weisenger, to start his conversion work on the island<sup>34</sup>. Besides, a small Bible Society was locally formed on the initiative of the English banker, Henry Drummond<sup>35</sup>. Other Bible Societies soon appeared, and a number of unauthorized versions of the Bible in Maltese translation but without the requisite *nihil obstat*, began to be distributed.

To make this proselytizing attempt even more obvious, a few gratuitous schools were opened for the poor children. These were often run by Protestant Ministers like the Rev. J. Keeling, a Methodist Missionary<sup>36</sup>, and Mr. Brownwell, a Wesleyan missionary<sup>37</sup>. The latter aroused so much local opposition by his unorthodox teaching of the Bible that he had to resign because he felt “constrained by a sense of Christian duty, to withdraw from all further connection with the Institution, in

30 Wettiger, Godfrey, “The History of Gozo from the early middle ages to modern time”, in “Gozo The Roots of an Island” – henceforth referred to as “Roots” – Malta 1990, p. 49.

31 Lee, Hilda, “British Policy towards the Religion, Ancient Laws and Customs in Malta 1824-1851”, in “Melita Historica”, Vol. III, No. 4, 1963, p. 2.

32 Bonnici, Mgr. Arthur, “Thirty Years to build a Protestant Church”, in “Melita Historica”, Vol. VI, No. 2, 1973, p. 183.

33 Id., *ibid*.

34 Sheridan Wilson, Samuel, “A Narrative of the Greek Mission; or Sixteen Years in Malta and Greece”, London, 1839, p. 62.

35 Idem, p. 69.

36 Idem, p. 100.

37 M.G.G., No. 1208, March 12, 1834, p. 90.

consequence of its being deemed advisable to withhold (sic!) the Holy Scriptures and religious instruction from the children”<sup>38</sup>.

Quite naturally, therefore, the local Church authorities were greatly alarmed, very much more so since a few well-known Maltese renounced their faith and became Protestant. Among these, one may, perhaps, mention Dr. Cleardo Naudi, Professor of Chemistry at the local University;<sup>39</sup> Reverend M.A. Camilleri, an apostate priest who had become an Anglican<sup>40</sup>, and Mikiel Anton Vassalli, Professor of Maltese and writer of scholarly books like “Lexicon” and “Mylsen Phoenico-Punicum sive Grammatica Melitensis”<sup>41</sup>, and now rightly considered as “The father of Maltese”. Although Vassalli may not have officially renounced his Catholic faith, he certainly helped – like Naudi and Camilleri – in the translation of the Bible without the requisite permission of the local Church authorities, and was, therefore censured, so that when he died, he was buried in a Protestant cemetery.<sup>42</sup>

Consequently, the local Church authorities kept aloof from the various attempts not only of school-opening but also of helping the spread of both English and Maltese.

#### ‘LA SOCIETÀ DELLE SCUOLE NORMALI DELLA VALLETTA’ IS BORN

It is against this background that one has to evaluate the bold attempt of an Anglo-Maltese Society formed in 1819 with the sole aim of popularizing education, and to assess its limited success.

An ‘ad hoc’ committee was soon elected to manage the society. It was made up of an equal number of Maltese and British gentlemen, and included a Roman Catholic priest in order to allay any moral suspicions in local Church authorities and parents alike, viz:

38 Id., *ibid.*

39 Sant, Rev. Mons. K., “It-Traduzzjoni tal-Bibbja u l-Ilsien Malti 1810-1850”. Malta, 1975, p. 3, Ftnote 9.

40 Idem, pp. 29-30.

41 Mifsud Bonnici, Robert, “Dizzjunarju Bijo-Biblijografiku Nazzjonali”, Malta, 1960, p. 508.

42 Id., *ibid.*

## PRESIDENT

(vacant)

## VICE-PRESIDENT

Chev. Paolo Parisio Moscati

## TREASURER

Mr. James Bell

## SECRETARY

Mr. Joseph Greaves

## MEMBERS FOR 1820

|                    |                            |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Mr. N.I. Aspinall  | Mr. Filippo Castagna       |
| Mr. Henry Cowper   | Mr. Vinc. Casolani         |
| Mr. Dr. Kennedy    | Mr. Vinc. Mamo             |
| Mr. Th. Mac Gill   | Mr. G.N. Premuda           |
| Mr. John Mackenzie | Mr. Bald. dei Conti Sant   |
| Mr. T.I. Rutter    | Mr. Felice Sciortino       |
| Mr. B.F. Telfer*   | Mr. Luigi Schembri         |
| Mr. W.H. Thornton  | Mr. E. dei M. Testaferrata |
| Mr. Henry Volger   | Rev. Vella <sup>43</sup> . |

Not to be outdone by the men, a number of altruistic ladies – British and Maltese – formed a similar society imbued with the same lofty ideals and aspirations, namely, to open ‘Normal’ schools for poor girls in both Malta and Gozo. The elected committee was made up of the following:

|              |                       |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| Mrs. Baynes  | Mrs. Aspinall         |
| Mrs. Bissett | Mrs. Borg             |
| Mrs. Cross   | Mrs. Casolani         |
| Mrs. Iliff   | Mrs. Marchesa di Piro |
| Mrs. Long    | Mrs. De Butet         |
| Mrs. Powell  | Mrs. Mamo             |
| Mrs. Rutter  | Mrs. Mizzi            |
| Mrs. Swain   | Mrs. Portelli         |
| Mrs. Wilson  | Mrs. Toole.           |

## SECRETARY

Mrs. Whitmore<sup>44</sup>

\* In the copy of the Report that the present writer has, the name ‘B.F. Telfer’ is cancelled and the name ‘D. Grant’ is handwritten beside it.

43 “Rapporto Della Società Delle Scuole Normali Della Valletta Dei 30 Ottobre, 1820, con APPENDICE contenente Le Leggi e Regolamenti della Società e la Lista dei contribuenti”, Malta, 1820, p3 – henceforth referred to simply as “Rapporto...”.

44 Idem. p. 4.

As was to be expected, the first endeavour of the committees was to rope in a number of supporting members who would be willing to contribute money towards the actualization of the dream. Fortunately, they were quite successful, for no less than 202 names appeared on the list of the first Report of the Society!<sup>45</sup> But there were other contributors; only their names did not appear because they had donated less than 10 *scudi*<sup>46</sup>.

Many registered supporters undertook to make an annual subscription of not less than 5 *scudi*, but there were several who promised to pay 10, 15 and even 20 *scudi* per annum<sup>47</sup>. Besides, there were others who made once-only contributions of 5 to 20 *scudi*; one even paid 25, one paid 39.3, another 40 and yet another 100 *scudi*, apart from their annual subscriptions.<sup>48</sup>

These once-only contributions added up to the considerable sum of 1230. 10 *scudi*, while the annual subscriptions amounted to no less than 1661 *scudi*.<sup>49</sup>

The committee also drew up a set of rules which would regulate the procedures of the Society and its committee as well as its Valletta schools. These are stated below ‘in toto’ in order to show how very meticulous all those involved were in order to ensure the success of their venture:

- I. The society is to be known as “Società delle Scuole Normali della Valletta”.<sup>50</sup>
- II. Any annual subscription of 5 *scudi* or a once-only donation of 50 *scudi* will entitle the donor to keep one pupil continuously in school, except in cases as detailed below.<sup>51</sup>
- III. Any annual subscription of 10 *scudi* or a once-only donation of 100 *scudi* will entitle the contributor to keep two pupils continuously in the school except as detailed below; and so on pro rata for bigger donations. Furthermore, such contributors will be considered as Directors of the Society, and as such will be eligible to become Committee Members, and will have the right to attend and vote in General Meetings.<sup>52</sup>

45 “Rapporto...”, pp. 17-23. Vide: Appendix “B” pp. 22-28 for full list.

46 Idem, p. 23 Ftnote: “Varie Donazioni di somme minori di Dieci Scudi sono state ricevute che non si trovano registrate nella ... lista”.

47 Idem, pp. 17-23.

48 Id., ibid.

49 Id., ibid.

50 Idem, p. 13.

51 Id., ibid.

52 Id., ibid.

- IV. No pupil under the age of 6 years will be admitted.<sup>53</sup>
- V. When only 20 vacancies remain to make up the total school population decided upon by the Committee, no pupils under the age of 8 will be admitted, and the older ones will be given preference.<sup>54</sup>
- VI. Absent contributors can recommend a student by proxy.<sup>55</sup>
- VII. A General Meeting of the Directors will be held annually in October, during which a report will be read – and, if approved, eventually published – giving details of the work done during the previous year. Besides, other regulations and decisions deemed necessary will be adopted. Furthermore, a President, all the Vice-Presidents, a Treasurer, a Secretary and other Members of the Committee will be newly-elected or re-elected, but that fourth part of the Committee (except the President and the Vice-Presidents) who least attended to their functions during the previous year will not be eligible for election for the following year<sup>56</sup>.
- VIII. A special meeting of the Directors will be convened on a request by, at least, 7 Members of the Committee or on a request by 12 Directors, after a 7-day notice in which the scope of such a Meeting is indicated<sup>57</sup>.
- IX. The Society will be under the direction of a Committee made up of 25 Directors as follows: 1 President, 4 Vice-Presidents, a Treasurer, a Secretary and 18 other Directors<sup>58</sup>.
- X. The Committee will meet on the first Thursday of every month, and 5 Members will form a quorum<sup>59</sup>.
- XI. The Committee can fill up any vacancy in its ranks – except that of President or Vice-President – occurring between General Meetings: the Directors calling a Meeting and electing the new Member during the next monthly Meeting<sup>60</sup>.
- XII. The Committee can elect as Honorary Members any persons – not living in Valletta or its neighbourhood – deemed to have performed some essential service to the Society<sup>61</sup>.
- XIII. Any three Members of the Committee may request a special meeting of the Committee, specifying the object of such a meeting in a written note which will be circularized together with the invitation to such a meeting<sup>62</sup>.

53 Id., *ibid.*

54 Id., *ibid.*

55 Id., *ibid.*

56 *Idem*, pp. 13-14.

57 *Idem*, p. 14.

58 Id., *ibid.*

59 Id., *ibid.*

60 Id., *ibid.*

61 Id., *ibid.*

62 Id., *ibid.*



- XIV. No Member of the Committee may be employed to do any work of the Society against a remuneration<sup>63</sup>.
- XV. The Committee must employ the Teacher of the School, and all the other ‘ufficiali inferiori’ of the Society. They must also draw up provisional regulations whereby the school will be managed up to the next General Meeting only, unless these are confirmed in such a meeting<sup>64</sup>.
- XVI. No book or paper to be used for instruction can be introduced in the school unless these are previously presented to and approved by the Committee<sup>65</sup>.
- XVII. If there is room in the school for more students than can be rightfully recommended by Contributors, the Committee can fill up such vacancies and even nominate students to fill such vacancies if there are not enough recommendations without, however, prejudicing the rights of contributors, in accordance with the following regulations<sup>66</sup>.
- XVIII. The Treasurer must accept all the sums of money received for use by the Society and make all payments sanctioned by the Committee. He must also, during the monthly meetings, present a note, drawn up by the Collector, listing all contributors who have not paid their contributions for three months. The Treasurer must also present before the Annual General Meeting a detailed account duly audited and closed by the Committee. Finally, the Treasurer must also deposit any funds with the Anglo-Maltese Bank. He must not hold any money except what is necessary to meet any recurrent monthly expenses<sup>67</sup>.
- XIX. Any pupil’s recommendation must be signed by his contributor who will specify the names of the pupil’s parents, their address, the number of children in the pupil’s family, the family profession and circumstances, as well as the name and age of the recommended pupil. This recommendation will be kept by the teacher for presentation before and approval by the Committee during the next monthly meeting. Once approved, it will be entered in the school register by the teacher<sup>68</sup>.
- XX. If a recommendation is not approved, or if the place of a recommended and admitted pupil becomes vacant, the teacher must immediately notify in writing the relevant contributor who may then recommend another pupil. But if he fails to do so for two weeks from the receipt of the notification, the Committee will, at the next monthly meeting, fill the

63 Id., *ibid.*

64 Id., *ibid.*

65 Id., *ibid.*

66 *Idem*, pp. 14-15.

67 *Idem*, p. 15.

68 Id., *ibid.*

- vacancy; and the contributor will lose his right of recommendation “per quella volta”<sup>69</sup>.
- XXI. All recommendations must be renewed annually by the Committee in August in the light of pupils’ good conduct reports drawn up by the teacher. Likewise all recommendations must be renewed every year by the contributors in January<sup>70</sup>.
- XXII. If a contributor dies, or refrains from making his annual subscription, or fails to renew his recommendation every year in January, then his recommended pupil will lose his place unless he is allowed to continue in school by the Committee. But such a pupil will always be liable to be withdrawn from school if there are no more places for students who, from time to time, are recommended by right by contributors<sup>71</sup>.
- XXIII. No pupil can be admitted who is not free from all contagious diseases; and all students must come to school clean, “ben lavati, e con i capelli tagliati e pettinati”<sup>72</sup>.
- XXIV. The school time-table will be as follows: from 9.00 a.m. to 12 noon throughout the year and from 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. from 1st March to 1st November. Throughout all the other months, the afternoon sessions will be from 2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m., but the Committee can make any changes they deem opportune<sup>73</sup>.
- XXV. In every monthly meeting of the Committee, two Inspectors for every week of the following month must be nominated. These must go to the school, at least, twice per week to test the progress made by the pupils and to ensure that good order prevails in the school. In an ‘ad hoc’ note-book, they must put down the time of their inspection, and make any comments regarding the teacher’s reports as well as any other aspect of the school. They must also sign their entry and present their report before the next monthly meeting of the committee<sup>74</sup>.
- XXVI. The teacher must make a daily note – or ask someone to do it – of all absentees, and he must also make a weekly note of the reasons given for such absences. He will present such notes to the Inspectors and make a relevant reference of such absences in his monthly report to the Committee. Besides, he must include in his report a note regarding pupils who were promoted from one class to another because of their progress during the proceeding month, and he must make a list too of any prizes handed out<sup>75</sup>.

69 *Id.*, *ibid.*

70 *Id.*, *ibid.*

71 *Idem*, pp. 15-16.

72 *Idem*, p. 16.

73 *Id.*, *ibid.*

74 *Id.*, *ibid.*

75 *Id.*, *ibid.*

- XXVII. The teacher must also keep a note of all the recommendations made by the contributors, or the Committee, regarding pupils. He must also record the reasons why any pupil left the school. Such notes are to be submitted to the Committee during the first meeting held in January, February, July and August of every year so that the Committee can check whether all the recommendations have been duly renewed and registered<sup>76</sup>.
- XXVIII. No one is allowed to change, omit or add to any of these rules and regulations without the authorization of a General Meeting<sup>77</sup>.

Despite the thorough preparations made and the hard work done by the Society throughout 1819, the school could not start operations as yet. In fact, in its first report read out during the General Meeting held on 15th October, 1820, it was explicitly stated that: “Quelli membri della ‘Società delle Scuole Normali della Valletta’, che furono presenti alla sua formazione, si ricorderanno che, una Seduta differita doveva tenersi fra il termine di due mesi. Il Comitato perciò è nel obbligo di esporre primieramente che, i loro arrangiamenti non essendo completi, i contribuenti sarebbero stati inutilmente radunati”<sup>78</sup>.

The Committee, therefore, proceeded “a sottomettere ai suoi costituenti un ragguaglio delle operazioni dell’anno passato, e dello stato presente dell’Istituzione”<sup>79</sup>.

The Committee had some very commendable aims regarding the education that was to be imparted in its schools, and knowing how crucial a factor a teacher always is in education, they immediately acquired the services of a certain Mr. Giuseppe Naudi, who had been studying the ‘Monitorial System’ in London, where he had been sent by the British and Foreign School Society who paid all his expenses<sup>80</sup>.

On his return, Mr. Naudi had opened a private school in which he quite successfully taught 42 local children. Impressed by his achievement, the Committee, in its meeting of 18th November, 1819, appointed him teacher of the school that they intended opening. His salary was, however, back-dated to 1st August, 1819<sup>81</sup>.

76 Id., ibid.

77 Id., ibid.

78 Idem, p. 5.

79 Id., ibid.

80 Idem, p. 5.

81 Id., ibid.

The British and Foreign School Society had been born in 1814 on the ashes of the Royal Lancasterian Association<sup>82</sup>, which, in turn, had been formed in 1810<sup>83</sup>. The method of teaching adopted by the Society of British and Foreign School was called ‘monitorial’ or ‘mutual’ and had been developed by a clergyman of the Established Church of England, Andrew Bell, and Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker<sup>84</sup>. Apparently, they had both “hit upon the device by accident and to have made their discovery independent of each other”<sup>85</sup>.

The most attractive feature of this ‘monitorial system’ was its cheapness at a time when education for the masses was considered a purely charitable undertaking throughout the world. In fact, “The annual cost of teaching a child in a Lancasterian school was 7s 6d.<sup>86</sup>, and in a very large school this amount could be still further reduced”<sup>87</sup>. Indeed, it was estimated that 500 pupils could be taught in the same school for 4s 2d per head (i.e. 2.5 *scudi*) per annum.<sup>88</sup>

If only for this reason, therefore, the method was exceptionally well suited for Malta and, as was to be expected, the Society was not unaware of its financial advantages. In fact, in their first report, they clearly stated that their major problem was limited to finding “un locale sufficientemente grande per dare pieno effetto a questo vantaggioso sistema, la superiorità del quale consiste nella pratica d’insegnare da 500 a 1,000 ragazzi per quasi l’istessa spesa, che occorrerebbe per imparare (sic!) da 50 a 100”<sup>89</sup>.

Besides, one teacher could, it was believed, teach a thousand pupils, because all he had to do was to teach a number of bright pupils, called ‘monitors’, who would then pass on the instruction they had themselves received to others<sup>90</sup>. The principal role of the teacher, therefore, was to instruct, oversee and inspire the monitors.

Naturally, the instruction given under such circumstances could not but be elementary in the extreme and very mechanical<sup>91</sup>. So rigid indeed was this method

82 Birchenough, Charles, “History of Elementary Education in England and Wales from 1800 to the Present Day”, London, 3rd Edition, 1938, pp. 44-45 et passim.

83 Barnard, H.C., “A History of English Education from 1760”, London, 3rd Impression, 1964, p. 56.

84 Idem, p. 53.

85 Id., *ibid.*

86 This would be equivalent to 4.5 *scudi*.

87 Curtis, S.J. and Boulwood, M.E.A., “An Introductory History of English Education since 1800”, London, 4th Edition, 1966, p. 10.

88 Id., *ibid.*

89 “Rapporto”, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

90 Barnard, *ut supra*, p. 54.

91 Id., *ibid.*

that it did not even allow for pupils to make questions, let alone show any creative impulse<sup>92</sup>. Despite these obvious disadvantages, however, some learning was achieved. Indeed, the system became very popular not only in England and Wales but also in other parts of the world as well, for we are told this teaching concept became so fashionable that Lancaster’s school in Borough Road attracted “Foreign princes, ambassadors, peers, commoners, ladies of distinction, bishops and archbishops, Jews and Turks”<sup>93</sup>.

So, The Normal School Society was not only introducing the most fashionable teaching method of the time, but also the guidance of an expert teacher – probably the first British – trained one in the history of Maltese education. The only possible flaw, therefore, was the fact that both Lancaster and Bell were, as we have seen, Protestant. Besides, although The British and Foreign School Society was allegedly non-sectarian, Bell’s National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, was, almost by definition, anti-Catholic. No wonder that the local Church authorities kept aloof from the local educational adventure! Nor must it be forgotten that up to the first decades of the 19th century, the education of the poor was deemed, throughout most of Europe, as a merely charitable undertaking. Indeed, “For the children of the lower orders no education which went beyond the merest rudiments of literacy was considered either necessary or appropriate”<sup>94</sup>. There were even some people who believed that the education of the masses was anti-social: “Much public opinion, indeed, among both the elite and the industrialists would have denied them even this meagre medium of instruction, believing that any education at all would render them dissatisfied with their lowly lot, and thus cause them to become a menace to the stability of society”<sup>95</sup>.

Luckily for Maltese education, this feeling was never so pronounced, and poor children flocked to any gratuitous school on the island, without any social repercussions either in writing or in fact! One major flaw in the Society’s thinking was, therefore, the invariable demand for a recommendation backed by the annual payment of, at least, 5 *scudi*<sup>96</sup> for every student admitted. However, it is to the Society’s credit that when there were more places than recommendations “sarà in libertà del Comitato di compire il numero”<sup>97</sup>, though this could only be done, provided that the contributors’ rights were not thereby prejudiced in any way<sup>98</sup>.

92 Id., *ibid.*

93 Cornston, W., “Life of Lancaster”, London, 1840, p. 11.

94 Dent, H.C., “The Educational System of England and Wales”, London, 2nd Edition, 1963, p. 16.

95 Id., *ibid.*

96 “Rapporto”, Regulation No. 2, p. 13.

97 Idem, Regulation No. XVII, p. 14.

98 Id., *ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

Having thus persuaded Mr. Naudi to join their school, the Society also solved their other problem of finding a big enough house to accommodate their students, by approaching the Governor, Lt. General, The Rt. Honourable, Sir Thomas Maitland (1813-1824), who very kindly offered them the use of a big hall on the ground floor “del cessato Ospedale di Marina”<sup>99</sup>. It was estimated that it could provide places for about 350 to 400 students<sup>100</sup>.

Besides, it had an entrance hall that would make-do instead of a yard, in which most pupils could take shelter from sun and rain before entering their class-room, and in which some of those who lived at a distance from the school could have their lunch<sup>101</sup>.

While all these feverish preparations were being made, no less a person than the Treasurer of the British and Foreign School Society, Mr. William Allen, arrived in Malta, after having visited several countries to promote “l’opera caritatevole dell’educazione universale”<sup>102</sup>. As was to be expected, the Committee grabbed the opportunity with both hands, asking questions and advice that would help them in their ambitious task<sup>103</sup>.

Having been encouraged by both the Governor and Mr. Allen, the Committee, on 25th February, 1820, appointed a sub-Committee made up of some of its Members to advise on all the requirements of the new school so that it would open its doors as early and as cheaply as possible<sup>104</sup>.

The sub-Committee carried out its mission very satisfactorily and expeditiously, for the new school opened its doors after slightly more than 2 months, on 15th May, 1820<sup>105</sup>.

In order to boost the number of potential ‘teaching personnel’, the Committee – after ensuring that the 42 pupils previously taught by Mr. Naudi in his school were fully cognizant of the ‘mutual method’ of teaching and, therefore potentially helpful as monitors – decided to admit them to their ‘Normal’ school without the requisite recommendations by contributors. However, these pupils had to seek and get such recommendations after the lapse of one year<sup>106</sup>.

99 Idem, p. 5.

100 Id., ibid.

101 Id., ibid.

102 Idem, p. 6.

103 Id., ibid.

104 Id., ibid.

105 Id., ibid.

106 Id., ibid.

Moreover, seeing that not more than 180 recommendations were to be expected, the Committee ‘generously’ decided to admit up to 50 pupils, “fanciulli di persone di mediocri circostanze pagando Sei Tari al mese; da essere ritenuti nella Scuola a beneplacito del Comitato”<sup>107</sup>.

One cannot, perhaps, but applaud such ‘altruism’. However, it could not even remotely benefit the poorest classes who were fighting a dire battle for subsistence and could not, therefore afford the 6 *tari* imposed! Mention has already been made of the wretched socio-economic conditions prevailing at the time, resulting from the depression which hit Malta after the initial boon of the immediate post-Napoleonic period. A few more statistics will, perhaps, give a clearer picture of the abysmal local poverty. In the 1830’s, out of a population of 114,236,<sup>108</sup> no less than 10,617 were poor<sup>109</sup>, and several “had been reduced to sleeping out of doors and to living on prickly pears, thistles and clover”<sup>110</sup>.

Nor was this way of life relieved by employment for “the family of a field labourer, consisting of five children, including the gains of the parents, earned about £5 a year all told”<sup>111</sup> – and there were 32,428 of these earning their living off the land, excluding 2,215 proprietors<sup>112</sup>. Besides, 15,000 more were engaged in the cotton industry<sup>113</sup> where male weavers received only 3d a day, male spinners 2d and females  $\frac{3}{4}$ d<sup>114</sup>. Other workers were in the same plight: a salt-pan labourer, for example, earned an average of  $3\frac{1}{2}$ d per day, whereas a tanner had to be content with just 1d for a full day’s work<sup>115</sup>. Yet wheaten bread, at the time “... The principal part of the diet of all classes in Malta ... of the working classes, it was almost the exclusive food”<sup>116</sup> cost  $2\frac{1}{3}$ d per rotolo (i.e. 1.75lbs.)<sup>117</sup>. Now, it is calculated that a male labourer consumed 2lbs. bread per day, while women and children half that amount. This means that even if they ate nothing else but barley bread which cost about  $1\frac{1}{2}$ d per pound, the cost of feeding a family of two parents and two children

107 Id., *ibid.*

108 Miege, Dominique, “Histoire de Malte”, Paris, 1840, Vol. I, p. 161.

109 Idem, p. 159.

110 Owen, Charles, “The Maltese Islands”, Newton Abbot, 1969, p. 57.

111 Laferla, A.V., “British Malta”, Malta, 1938, vol. I, p. 162.

112 Miege, Dominique, *ut supra*, p. 159.

113 Mangion, Giovanni, “Governo Inglese, Risorgimento Italiano Ed Opinione Pubblica a Malta (1848-1851)”, Malta, 1970, p. 17.

114 Price, Charles, “Malta and the Maltese A Study in Nineteenth Century Migration” Melbourne, 1954, Appendix A, p. 215.

115 Id., *ibid.*

116 Dixon, C. Willis, “The Colonial Administrations of Sir Thomas Maitland”, London, 1939, p. 163.

117 Price, Charles, *ut supra*, p. 217.

for one year would be in the region of £11.8 – more than double the family’s yearly earnings!

In such dismal circumstances, how could a parent afford to pay 6 *tari* per month – more than three days’ pay! Indeed, one finds it difficult not to conclude that the Committee members shared the then current universal view that education was not meant for the really poor.

In fact, seemingly oblivious of the prevailing destitution and penury, the Committee unconcernedly expressed their joy at the fact that the Reading Lessons in their Valletta schools were the same as those used in Florence, Italy, and were based on the ‘mutual’ teaching method. Their only note of regret regarded the sudden death of Mr. Giuseppe Slythe, one of the founders of the Society, and an indefatigable Committee member<sup>118</sup>. In fact, on the eve of the onset of the illness which ended his life, he had attended a sitting. No one, at the time, had the slightest inkling that five days later, one would be taking part in his funeral cortege.

Meanwhile, the schools were in full operation and, in accordance with Regulation XXV of the Society, the appointed Inspectors had made their weekly visits to the school and sent in their reports – regularly favourable. Good comments were also made by the several visitors to the school<sup>119</sup>. Certainly, the pupils’ attendance was regular, for the Committee proudly announced that despite the discipline in the school, the children gladly attended. Even those who had initially absented themselves, were now very regular and punctual in their attendance. The parents, too, showed their interest by sending written apologies whenever sickness or some other circumstance prevented their children from attending<sup>120</sup>.

The following Tables give a very detailed picture of the school population by class, as well as the numbers promoted from one class to another because of the progress achieved in the short time under review:

118 “Rapporto”, p. 6. Very strangely, Mr. Slythe’s name does not appear as a Committee member, but only in the subscribers’ list.

119 *Id.*, p. 7.

120 *Id.*, *ibid.*

121 *Id.*, *ibid.*

122 *Id.*, *ibid.*

123 *Id.*, *ibid.*

124 *Idem.*, p. 8.

125 *Id.*, *ibid.*



Table 1

|  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| Pupils admitted to Class I .....                 | 63                |
| Promoted to Class II .....                       | 21                |
| Promoted to Class III .....                      | 10                |
| Promoted to Class IV .....                       | 3                 |
| Promoted to Class V .....                        | 3                 |
| Promoted to Class VI .....                       | 1                 |
| So, the number of pupils in Class I is now ..... | 16 <sup>121</sup> |

Table 2

|   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| Pupils admitted to Class II .....                 | 20               |
| Promoted to Class III .....                       | 5                |
| Promoted to Class IV .....                        | 4                |
| Promoted to Class V .....                         | 2                |
| Promoted to Class VI .....                        | 3                |
| Promoted to Class VII .....                       | 1                |
| So, the number of pupils in Class II is now ..... | 2 <sup>122</sup> |

Table 3

|  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| Pupils admitted to Class III .....                 | 28               |
| Promoted to Class IV .....                         | 4                |
| Promoted to Class V .....                          | 1                |
| Promoted to Class VI .....                         | 2                |
| Promoted to Class VII .....                        | 4                |
| So, the number of pupils in Class III is now ..... | 8 <sup>123</sup> |

Table 4

|   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| Pupils admitted to Class IV .....                 | 20                |
| Promoted to Class V .....                         | 3                 |
| Promoted to Class VI .....                        | 2                 |
| Promoted to Class VII .....                       | 4                 |
| Promoted to Class VIII .....                      | 2                 |
| So, the number of pupils in Class IV is now ..... | 13 <sup>124</sup> |

Table 5

|  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| Pupils admitted to Class V .....                 | 10               |
| Promoted to Class VI .....                       | 5                |
| So, the number of pupils in Class V is now ..... | 4 <sup>125</sup> |

Table 6

|   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| Pupils admitted to Class VI .....                 | 15               |
| Promoted to Class VII .....                       | 1                |
| Promoted to Class VIII .....                      | 3                |
| So, the number of pupils in Class IV is now ..... | 6 <sup>126</sup> |

Table 7

|  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| Pupils admitted to and remaining in Class VII .....  | 4                |
| Pupils admitted to and remaining in Class VIII ..... | 1 <sup>127</sup> |

Table 8

|   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| Total number of pupils admitted to the school ..... | 170                |
| Actually on the register .....                      | 139 <sup>128</sup> |

Of the 31 students who left the school, some did so when they were offered a job, others who came from the countryside had to desist because of the distance, and two were expelled because of their bad conduct. Only a very small number indeed had left without any plausible reason<sup>129</sup>.

Meanwhile, the ladies Committee had not been lying idle; but for a variety of reasons their school could not start operations before 2nd July, 1820. The number of students was initially 16, and there was only one class, held in the entrance hall previously used by the boys to gather and dine in – a very unhappy and inconvenient situation. Despite this undoubted disadvantage, however, the girls, too, were soon making good progress and, within a very short time, the number of students had risen to 60<sup>130</sup>.

Quite apart from this inconvenience, the Committee disliked the idea of having both schools in the same premises, and they had, therefore, changed the girls’s timetable so that they would start 30 minutes before the boys. But the new arrangement was far from convenient, and the Committee hoped that they would soon have a separate building<sup>131</sup>.

126 Id., *ibid.*  
 127 Id., *ibid.*  
 128 Id., *ibid.*  
 129 Id., *ibid.*  
 130 *Idem*, pp. 8-9.  
 131 *Idem*, p. 9.

Regardless of these teething troubles, the Committee stated with considerable pride that 200 children, who would otherwise have grown up in ignorance, idleness and vice, were being civilized so that they would not, later on, become a public charge<sup>132</sup>.

In order fully to assess the advantages accruing to the whole Maltese community from the Society’s work, the Committee stated, one must only envisage the day when the present-day pupils will pass on the knowledge and manners they had learned in school to their children and these, in turn, to their own children. What a different social picture would this conjure up!

Egged on by their success, the Committee asked the educated section of the local community to pass an impartial judgement in favour of such a fledgling institution, and so help, together with their friends, to put the school on a more regular basis. They pointed out that, despite all their efforts, the Reading Lessons were still incomplete, and those of Arithmetic were still handwritten – all because of lack of funds<sup>133</sup>.

Finally, the Committee were pleased to note that their initiative was bearing fruit even outside Valletta, for a provisional committee had been elected in Zejtun whose aim was to form a society that would make it its duty to open a similar school for poor children in their locality. The Committee’s great wish and hope were that other, well-meaning, and altruistic persons in other villages would imitate such an example so that eventually there would not be in all Malta and Gozo a single boy or girl who would be deprived of the benefits of an elementary education<sup>134</sup>.

The Society’s first report also gave details of their revenue and expenditure for that current year, viz:

Table 9

REVENUE

|   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|
| Contributions & donations, <i>Scudi</i> ..... | 2838.2.0                |
| Students paying 6 <i>tari</i> monthly .....   | 32.0.0                  |
| Total .....                                   | 2870.2.0 <sup>135</sup> |

132 Id., ibid.

133 Id., ibid.

134 Id., ibid.

135 Idem, p. 10.

Table 10

EXPENDITURE

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| To furnish the boys' school, <i>Scudi</i> .....  | 1010.11.10 |
| To furnish the girls' school, <i>Scudi</i> ..... | 426.01.02  |
| Slates, pencils, lessons, prizes .....           | 340.09.05  |
| Male teacher's salary .....                      | 850.00.00  |
| Female teacher's salary .....                    | 128.00.00  |
|  | <hr/>      |
|  | 2755.09.17 |
| Deposited with the Anglo-Maltese Bank .....      | 114.04.03  |
|  | <hr/>      |
|  | 2870.02.00 |

These accounts were signed by Mr. Bell, the Treasurer, and dated 15th October, 1820<sup>136</sup>.

When the Committee Members, Thomas Mac Gill and G.N. Premuda audited and closed the accounts they confirmed that the Society had a credit balance of *Scudi* 114.04.03<sup>137</sup>.

## RISE AND DECLINE OF THE 'NORMAL SCHOOLS'

As already stated, the success of the Society and its Valletta schools prompted the opening of the two other schools in Zejtun, one for boys and the other for girls. The motive power behind this village movement was, apparently, the Spanish consul for Malta, Chevalier Don Alberto Megino, who even pulled down a small, private theatre in his own house to provide the timber required for the addition of an extra room in the school "which had been erected chiefly by himself"<sup>138</sup>.

In 1829, the school was still shedding its limited but highly beneficent light under the direction of Fr. Luigi Camilleri, who seems to have worked very hard to make the school succeed<sup>139</sup>. His efforts were rewarded for as from 1st February, 1825, the government began to pay him a salary of £2.10 per month<sup>140</sup>.

This move by the government was quite surprising when one considers that in England itself no government had ever made any financial provisions for elementary education prior to 1833 when, by a Parliamentary resolution, it was decided that

136 *Idem*, p. 11.

137 *Id.*, *ibid.*

138 Sheridan Wilson, Samuel, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-137.

139 DeBono, Joseph, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

140 *Id.*, *ibid.*

“...a sum, not exceeding twenty thousand pounds, be granted ... in aid of Private Subscriptions for the Erection of School Houses, for the Education of the Children of the Poorer Classes in Great Britain...”<sup>141</sup>.

Meanwhile, the girls’ school in Zejtun was also in operation, and its teacher was paid a salary of £1.18.4d by the government, in addition to her wages from the Society<sup>142</sup>.

The local government seems to have been infected by the generosity and altruism shown in the erection of the four schools, for it went beyond helping with the teachers’ salaries. In fact, in order further to help the Society, the “Vocabolario Inglese”, Parts I and II, as well as “Fables and other short stories”, all for use in the Normal Schools, were printed free of charge at the Government Printing Press, in 1830 and 1832 respectively. Six hundred copies of each were printed and sold for the Society’s benefit<sup>143</sup>. It does not seem that any attempt was made to teach Maltese, probably because there were no text-books in the language up to 1824, except for ‘Taghlim Nisrani’, translated from Italian by Francesco Wzzino<sup>144</sup>, and two other books, one by Francesco Vella, entitled “Chtieb il Kari Yau Dahla’al ilsien Malti”, published in 1824, and the other by G. Montebello Pulis, under the title “Trattat Fuq l’Obblighi Tal-Bniedem”, printed in 1826<sup>145</sup>.

The English Methodist missionary, Rev. J. Keeling, is also reputed to have procured and printed translations of some elementary works in Maltese<sup>146</sup>, but it is not known when such works were printed.

Meanwhile, the number of students in the schools went on increasing, so that in 1828, the government had appropriated a big house at No. 178 St. Christopher Street, in Valletta, to serve as a school instead of the original building which had become increasingly overcrowded<sup>147</sup>. In 1828, too, probably encouraged by the success of the Zejtun schools, the government opened another school in Gozo<sup>148</sup>. The teacher in charge was Dr. Luigi Pace who, however, was soon succeeded by Francesco Saverio Muscat. The salary given was 50 *scudi* per annum<sup>149</sup>. Fifty pupils

141 Barnard, H.C.B., op. cit., p. 69.

142 DeBono, Joseph, ut supra, loc. cit.

143 Mangion, Marry C., “The early Primary Schools of Malta up to 1838”, Unpublished thesis, University of Malta, 1953, p. pp. 30-31.

144 Marshall, David, “History of the Maltese Language in Local Education”, Malta, 1971, p. 3.

145 Cremona, Ant., “Mikiel Anton Vassalli u Żminijietu” Malta, 1975, p. 54.

146 Sheridan Wilson, Samuel, op. cit., p. 100.

147 M.G.G., No. 935, Jan. 14th, 1829, p. 7.

148 Id., ibid.

149 “Ghawdex”, No. 53, June 8th, 1947, p. 1.

were to be admitted, of whom 35 were to pay no fees; the other 15 paying only a nominal fee for the teacher's salary<sup>150</sup>. Each village had the right to send a number of children in proportion to its population<sup>151</sup>.

To arouse the interest and motivation of the pupils in these schools, Prize Days were held every six months, at which very often the Governor or his representative attended. For instance, on 31st January, 1823, the Lieutenant Governor, who had accepted the chairmanship of the Society, distributed the prizes, after having presided over the annual General Meeting of the paying members<sup>152</sup>. On Friday, 18th February, 1825, The Marquis of Hastings was again scheduled to attend the General Meeting, while his consort was to hand out the 'premiums' to the girls<sup>153</sup>.

Within ten years, the Society could rightly boast that no less than 1088 boys and 893 girls had been educated in their two Valletta schools alone, but the wave of philanthropism which had helped the Society in its initial efforts began to subside, and impassioned pleas began to appear for donations according to one's means<sup>154</sup>. Very significantly, too, the number of Maltese Members on the Committee of eighteen had dwindled to six<sup>155</sup>.

But luckily for the Society and for Maltese education in general, there never was in these islands the church-state conflict that existed in both England and elsewhere<sup>156</sup>. Certainly, at first the Catholic church rightly remained aloof, because of the well-founded suspicion that, at least some, of the British enthusiasm for the education of the masses was nothing but a ruse to proselytize the islanders' s children. Soon, however, even these suspicions began to fade, and when, in the General Meeting held on 5th February, 1833, Governor Ponsonby proposed that Rear Admiral Briggs be elected Chairman, and the Archdeacon of the Cathedral, Dr. Don Salv. Falzon, and Protestant clergyman, Rev. John Cleugh, be elected Vice-Chairmen of the Society, the suggestions were unanimously accepted, and all three nominees accepted their positions<sup>157</sup>.

150 *Id.*, *ibid.*

151 *Id.*, *ibid.*

152 M.G.G., No. 552, Jan. 28th, 1823, p. 3370.

153 M.G.G., No. 725, Feb. 9th, 1825, p. 47.

154 M.G.G.'s, No. 935, Jan. 14th, 1829, *ut supra*, *loc. cit.* and No. 1150, Feb. 13th, 1833, pp. 54-55.

155 DeBono, Joseph, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

156 Peterson, A.D.C., "A Hundred Years of Education", London, 2nd Edition, 1960, pp. 25-26 *et seq.*

157 M.G.G. No. 1150, Feb. 13th, 1833 p. 54.

In 1834, the government decided to help the Society still further by “opening a Normal School in the Three Cities”<sup>158</sup>. Its first teacher, Rev. Fr. Fortunato Panzavecchia, was later destined to be the first Director of “Elementary Education” in Malta.

The school started operations in July, 1834, at Senglea. Besides the 3R’s, it provided instruction in English, Italian, Character-Training and Elementary Navigation<sup>159</sup>. This incidentally shows that English, too, had begun to feature in the Normal Schools!

Government Expenditure on these schools had now risen to £400 annually, distributed as follows:

|                       |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Valetta schools ..... | £250                |
| Senglea schools ..... | £100                |
| Gozo schools .....    | £ 50 <sup>160</sup> |

It is rather curious that no figures are cited for the schools at Zejtun!

Despite all these efforts, however, the instruction that was imparted could only be very limited indeed, and when the Austin-Lewis Commission came to Malta, they found that there were only 450 boys and 278 girls attending the Valletta and Senglea schools, whereas in Gozo, the number was ‘inconsiderable’<sup>161</sup>.

Again, no numbers are cited for the Zejtun Schools, but a writer alleges that they catered for 45 boys and 30 girls<sup>162</sup>.

The Commissioners decried the instruction given in all these schools, describing it as “small in quantity and bad in quality”<sup>163</sup>. Nor was this an exaggeration, for a British resident on the Island at the time echoed these words, saying that “in regard to mental culture”, the Normal schools had “effected next to nothing”<sup>164</sup>. Certainly,

158 Laferla, A.V., “Education Department – Annual Report, 1928-1929”, (G)overnment (P)rinting (O)ffice, Malta, 1929, p. 1.

159 Mangion, Mary C., op. cit., p. 33.

160 M.G.G., No. 1429, April 25th, 1838, p. 163.

161 “Copies or Extracts of Reports of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Affairs of the Island of Malta and of Correspondence thereupon”, 1838, Part II, p. 41. (Henceforth referred to as “Extracts”).

162 Mangion, Mary, C., op. cit., p. 34.

163 “Extracts”, op. cit., p. 42.

164 Badger, G.P., “A Letter on the Eligibility of the Maltese Dialect”, Malta, 1841, p. 4.

a Maltese witness before the Commission had this to say: "... in Casal Musta, not more than 50 of its 3,734 inhabitants can read"<sup>165</sup>. Nor was this pathetic situation limited to Mosta, for according to the Commissioners, only "About 1,764 persons, including the clergy, can read and write in the casals; in Gozo about 350"<sup>166</sup>. One need only, perhaps, quote the figures annexed to his answers to the Commissioners by the Honourable Agostino Portelli to realize the full extent of the general illiteracy prevailing at the time. Out of a total population of 115,570 people in the whole archipelago, 99,384 were "in a state of ignorance"<sup>167</sup>.

It is, therefore, against this background that one has to evaluate the achievements of the Normal Schools' Society. Only thus, despite the criticisms levelled at it, would we be in a position really and honestly to state that "one cannot but feel grateful to the Normal Schools Society, for it was due to its well-meaning efforts that education was opened to the lower classes of the people"<sup>168</sup>. Certainly, few people would deny that thanks to the Society's doggedness in the face of difficulties, the way was paved "for popular education, because after the visit of the Royal Commissioners to Malta, the Normal Schools were taken entirely into the hands of the Government", and they were, therefore "the tiny seeds from which grew the great number of schools known to-day as the Government Primary Schools"<sup>169</sup>. In fact, even a Director of Education admitted as much, saying: "The beginnings of elementary education in Malta are due to a private society – *the Normal School Society* – founded in 1819"<sup>170</sup>.

Despite its highly commendable efforts, however, the Society could not provide a gratuitous system of education for all the children in a community that was, in its majority, living at subsistence level. For, only free schools could possibly entice the children of the really poor. After all, even the wife of one of the Commissioners, Mrs. Sarah Austen – probably the greatest benefactress in the history of Maltese education – admitted that it was "impossible to make the Maltese pay a *grano* (i.e. about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a farthing) a week: they would not send their children to school"<sup>171</sup>. A Maltese educationist expressed the same view: "The Maltese parents could not pay for the education of their children"<sup>172</sup>.

165 "Extracts", op. cit., Part I, p. 21.

166 *Idem*, Part III, p. 12.

167 *Id.*, *ibid.* Footnote.

168 Mangion, Mary C., op. cit., p. 35.

169 *Id.*, *ibid.*

170 Laferla, A.V., "The Dawn of Elementary Education in Malta", in "The Malta Chronicle", No. 11236, May 9th, 1931, p. 4

171 Ross, Janet, "Three Generations of English Women", London, 1838, Vol. 1, p. 121.

172 Mangion, Mary C., op. cit. p. 59.



So, despite the gratitude which we all owe to the Normal Schools’ Society, we have to admit that they had set themselves too idealistic an aim; for the provision of a complete system of gratuitous education for the lower classes could not be achieved through mere voluntary effort, however generous the donors were. Only the Government could, through taxation, provide a free school in every town and village, regardless of its size, in both Malta and Gozo.

Yet, no one can deny the fact that it was the Society which took the first tentative and hazardous steps into the dark and difficult unknown, thereby lighting up the trail that the government eventually followed!

## APPENDIX A

Although, after the departure of the French troops from Malta, the British were ‘de facto’ in command, they had not yet decided whether they would, in fact, stay on or leave. Certainly, by the Xth article of the Treaty of Amiens, they had bound themselves to hand over the Islands back to the Order of St. John, even though the Maltese were dead set against this eventuality.

So, for the first few years, the British allowed a number of foreign coins, mostly Sicilian, Neapolitan and Spanish to circulate freely in the Islands. Arguably the most in common use were the following:

1 *Scudo* which was equal to 12 *Tari*

1 *Tari* which was equal to 20 *Grani*

British coins included:

- (a) one-pound gold coins, later changed to 1-pound paper notes.  
Each pound was worth 20 shillings;
- (b) half-pound gold coins, later changed to half-pound paper notes,  
each equivalent to 10 shillings;
- (c) silver crowns, each worth 5 shillings;
- (d) silver half-crowns, each worth 2 shillings and six pence;
- (e) silver florins, each worth two shillings;
- (f) silver shillings, each worth twelve pence;
- (g) silver six-penny and three-penny pieces;
- (h) Copper pennies, each equal to four farthings;
- (i) Copper half-pennies;
- (j) Copper farthings each equal to 3 *grani*.

Current Maltese coinage includes:

1 Maltese Lira base metal coin each equivalent to 100 cents;

1 50-cent base-metal coin;

1 25-cent base-metal coin;

1 10-cent base-metal coin;

1 2-cent base-metal coin; and

1 1-cent copper coin, each equivalent to 10 mils;

There were also 5-, 3- and 2-mil coins but they have now virtually disappeared.

#### SOME EXAMPLES OF EQUIVALENCE:

one pound sterling was equivalent to 12 *scudi*, and a shilling was equal to 7 *tari* and 4 *grani*. A penny (1d) was worth 12 *grani*.

In terms of current Maltese money, 1 penny was equal to 4 mils, and a shilling equal to 5c. A crown was equal to 25 cents.

On the other hand, 1 *scudo* is equal to 8 cents 3 mils, and 1 *tari* would be equal to almost 7 mils.

## Appendix B

### LISTA

DELLE

#### DONAZIONI E CONTRIBUTIONI ANNUALI.

|                  |                      | Donazioni, Contribuzioni Annuali. |        |
|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|
|                  |                      | Scodi.                            | Scodi. |
| Atofimy.....     | Signor F.....        | 10                                | 10     |
| Aspmail.....     | " N. F.....          | 19                                | 10     |
| ".....           | Signora.....         |                                   | 5      |
| Andersson.....   | Sig. W.....          | 40                                | 10     |
| Annitto.....     | ".....               |                                   | 10     |
| Asaspori.....    | Sig. Dr.....         |                                   | 10     |
| Asespori.....    | Sig. A. Teres.....   |                                   | 5      |
| Aymp.....        | Signora.....         |                                   | 5      |
| Allesi.....      | ".....               |                                   | 5      |
| Bell & Comp..... | Signori Javan.....   | 80                                | 80     |
| Borg.....        | Sig. Joseph.....     | 40                                | 10     |
| ".....           | Signora.....         |                                   | 5      |
| Bogaja.....      | Sig. F. S.....       | 30                                |        |
| Borg.....        | Sig. Michele.....    | 15                                |        |
| Brosig.....      | " Giuseppe.....      |                                   | 10     |
| Brato.....       | " Dr.....            | 10                                | 10     |
| ".....           | Signora.....         | 10                                | 10     |
| Bisetti.....     | ".....               |                                   | 10     |
| Bron.....        | Sig. W.....          |                                   | 5      |
| Bratlan.....     | Signora.....         |                                   | 5      |
| Boly.....        | ".....               |                                   | 5      |
| Bulch.....       | ".....               | 15                                |        |
| Bordi.....       | " Maria Barbara..... |                                   | 5      |
| Bomitta.....     | ".....               |                                   | 5      |
| Bomitta.....     | ".....               |                                   | 5      |
| Bausovich.....   | Signor.....          |                                   | 5      |
| Bearchiet.....   | Signora.....         |                                   | 10     |

3

|                      |                       | Donazioni, Contribuzioni Annuali. |        |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|
|                      |                       | Scodi.                            | Scodi. |
| Colbert Bell & Co    | Signori.....          | 30                                | 30     |
| Colbert.....         | Signora.....          |                                   | 10     |
| Corlet.....          | Sig. T.....           |                                   | 10     |
| ".....               | Signora.....          |                                   | 5      |
| Couper.....          | Sig. Henry.....       | 30                                | 30     |
| ".....               | Signora.....          |                                   | 5      |
| ".....               | ".....                |                                   | 5      |
| Castagn.....         | Sig. Filippo.....     | 20                                | 30     |
| ".....               | Signora.....          |                                   | 10     |
| Cacchi.....          | Sig. D. Matteo.....   |                                   | 10     |
| Cora.....            | Sig. Lorenzo.....     | 10                                | 10     |
| ".....               | pro pax, semin.....   | 10                                | 10     |
| ".....               | Signora.....          |                                   | 5      |
| Casolari.....        | Sig. Vincenzo.....    | 30                                |        |
| ".....               | Signora.....          |                                   | 5      |
| ".....               | Sig. Giuseppe.....    |                                   | 10     |
| Critchell.....       | Signora.....          |                                   | 5      |
| Cross.....           | ".....                |                                   | 10     |
| Cuth.....            | ".....                |                                   | 5      |
| Cavan.....           | " E.....              |                                   | 5      |
| Cavan.....           | " A.....              |                                   | 5      |
| Ceruzzi.....         | ".....                |                                   | 10     |
| Cappari.....         | Sig. Andrea.....      |                                   | 10     |
| Daguid.....          | Sig. Thomas.....      | 30                                | 30     |
| Dongalli.....        | " F.....              | 10                                |        |
| Detaro.....          | " G. A.....           |                                   | 10     |
| Douglass.....        | " N.....              |                                   | 10     |
| ".....               | Signora.....          |                                   | 5      |
| David.....           | Sig. J.....           |                                   | 5      |
| De Courty.....       | Don. Signora.....     | 10                                | 4      |
| De Buit.....         | Signora.....          |                                   | 5      |
| Drow.....            | ".....                |                                   | 5      |
| Dedomenico.....      | Sig. Michele.....     |                                   | 15     |
| Diugli.....          | " Dr. Paolo.....      |                                   | 10     |
| De la Condamine..... | ".....                |                                   | 10     |
| De Pir.....          | Signora Marchesa..... |                                   | 5      |

|                            |                            | Donazioni, Contribuzioni Annuali. |        |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|
|                            |                            | Scodi.                            | Scodi. |
| Fernandes.....             | Sig. Giuseppe.....         | 10                                | 5      |
| Fesch.....                 | Signora.....               |                                   | 10     |
| Fischer.....               | ".....                     |                                   | 10     |
| Fletcher.....              | Sig. Henry.....            | 30                                | 10     |
| ".....                     | Signora.....               |                                   | 5      |
| Frischko.....              | Sig. Ernesto.....          |                                   | 5      |
| Grant.....                 | Sig. David.....            | 20                                | 30     |
| Gali.....                  | " Salvatore.....           |                                   | 10     |
| ".....                     | Signora.....               |                                   | 5      |
| ".....                     | " Antonia.....             |                                   | 5      |
| ".....                     | " Contessa.....            |                                   | 5      |
| ".....                     | Sig. Vincenzo.....         |                                   | 10     |
| Graves.....                | " Joseph.....              | 10                                | 10     |
| Grasford.....              | ".....                     | 10                                | 10     |
| ".....                     | Signora.....               |                                   | 10     |
| Gilchrist.....             | Sig. Sadi.....             | 10                                | 10     |
| Gingell.....               | " Edward.....              |                                   | 10     |
| Giacomo.....               | Rev. Sig. Padre Carlo..... |                                   | 10     |
| Grogan.....                | Sig. Giorgio.....          |                                   | 5      |
| Gorman.....                | " G.....                   |                                   | 10     |
| Gordon.....                | ".....                     |                                   | 5      |
| Gucci.....                 | Signora.....               |                                   | 5      |
| Galati.....                | Sig. Giorgio.....          |                                   | 10     |
| Hunter.....                | Sig. Jameson.....          | 25                                |        |
| ".....                     | Signora.....               | 10                                |        |
| Harter.....                | Sig. J. G.....             |                                   | 10     |
| Harper.....                | " Henry.....               |                                   | 10     |
| Higgins Dunson & Comp..... | Signora.....               | 30                                |        |
| Hill.....                  | Signora.....               |                                   | 5      |
| Inghel.....                | ".....                     |                                   | 5      |

|                  | Diaz no.                  | Contributions |        |
|------------------|---------------------------|---------------|--------|
|                  |                           | Scudi.        | Scudi. |
| Johnston.....    | Sig. r. C. ....           |               | 10     |
| Jorwell.....     | Rev. Sig. William         | 10            | 10     |
| ".....           | Signora.....              |               | 10     |
| Kennedy.....     | Sig. r. Dr. ....          |               | 10     |
| ".....           | Signora.....              |               | 5      |
| King.....        | ".....                    |               | 5      |
| Kemp.....        | ".....                    |               | 5      |
| Kilburn.....     | ".....                    |               | 5      |
| Lubersich.....   | Signor.....               |               | 10     |
| Long.....        | Signora.....              |               | 10     |
| Louder.....      | ".....                    |               | 10     |
| Lewis.....       | ".....                    |               | 5      |
| Lowe.....        | ".....                    |               | 5      |
| Lutwiler.....    | Signor.....               |               | 5      |
| Moor.....        | S. R. Sir Graham.....     | 40            | 20     |
| ".....           | Lady.....                 | 50            | 10     |
| Marmley.....     | Sig. r. Generale.....     | 100           | 50     |
| MacGill.....     | " Thomas.....             | 30            | 30     |
| MacIntosh.....   | " John.....               | 30            | 30     |
| Mareh.....       | " Angela.....             | 10            | 10     |
| Mason.....       | " Vincenzo.....           | 10            | 10     |
| Mauwaring.....   | Signora.....              | 20            | 20     |
| ".....           | ".....                    | 10            | 10     |
| Maczo.....       | Sig. r. Giovanni.....     | 15            |        |
| Morris.....      | " Joseph.....             | 10            | 10     |
| Montgomery.....  | " Frederick.....          | 20            | 20     |
| MacKenzie.....   | " John.....               | 10            | 10     |
| Naz Piarolo..... | Signora.....              | 10            | 5      |
| Mantano.....     | ".....                    |               | 5      |
| Migli.....       | ".....                    |               | 5      |
| Moscati.....     | Sig. Cav. P. Parnio.....  | 10            | 10     |
| ".....           | Sig. r. B. A. Parnio..... | 5             | 5      |
| MacKerrill.....  | Sig. r. John.....         | 20            | 20     |

|                   | Diaz no.              | Contributions |        |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------|--------|
|                   |                       | Scudi.        | Scudi. |
| Naudi.....        | Sig. r. Dr. ....      | 10            | 10     |
| Osefrio.....      | Signora.....          | 5             | 5      |
| Pasock & Comp.    | Signori R. ....       | 20            |        |
| Parilli.....      | Sig. r. Vincenzo..... | 10            | 10     |
| Peppoly.....      | " G. D. M. ....       | 20            |        |
| Premati.....      | " G. N. ....          | 15            | 10     |
| ".....            | Signora.....          |               | 5      |
| Priestly.....     | Sig. r. W. H. ....    |               | 5      |
| Parzelli.....     | Signora.....          |               | 15     |
| Pallomo.....      | Signor.....           |               | 5      |
| Powell.....       | Signora.....          |               | 5      |
| Prout.....        | ".....                |               | 5      |
| Petronchino.....  | Sig. r. Paolo.....    |               | 20     |
| Robinson.....     | Sig. r. John.....     | 20            |        |
| ".....            | Signora.....          |               | 5      |
| Raitt.....        | ".....                | 15            |        |
| Rocco.....        | Sig. r. R. ....       | 20            |        |
| Rutter.....       | ".....                |               | 10     |
| ".....            | Signora.....          |               | 5      |
| Raitt.....        | ".....                |               | 5      |
| Routh.....        | ".....                |               | 10     |
| Stuart.....       | Sig. r. Peter.....    | 20            | 20     |
| Stytle.....       | " Joseph.....         | 20            | 20     |
| ".....            | " William.....        |               | 10     |
| Scott & Comp..... | Signori Thomas.....   | 20            | 20     |
| Southwood.....    | Sig. r. Thomas.....   | 20            | 20     |
| Scudron.....      | " Felice.....         | 10            | 10     |
| Scopinich.....    | " Stefano.....        | 10            |        |
| Schember.....     | " Luigi.....          | 20            | 20     |
| ".....            | Signora R. M. ....    | 5             | 5      |
| ".....            | " Teresa.....         | 5             | 5      |

|                     | Diaz no.                  | Contributions |        |
|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------|--------|
|                     |                           | Scudi.        | Scudi. |
| Sold.....           | Sig. r. Salvatore.....    |               | 10     |
| Sequist.....        | " Vincenzo.....           |               | 10     |
| Secherratt.....     | " Camillo.....            |               | 20     |
| Spiano.....         | " G. A. ....              | 15            |        |
| Stevens.....        | " William.....            |               | 10     |
| ".....              | Signora B. ....           | 5             | 5      |
| Spurrier.....       | Sig. r. John.....         |               | 10     |
| Skery.....          | Signora.....              |               | 5      |
| Sott.....           | Sig. r. B. del Conti..... | 10            |        |
| ".....              | Signora Contessa.....     | 5             | 5      |
| Safary.....         | Signor.....               |               | 5      |
| Sorah.....          | Signora.....              |               | 5      |
| Tambochis.....      | Sig. r. M. G. ....        | 15            |        |
| ".....              | Signora.....              |               | 5      |
| Tyngem.....         | Sig. r. G. B. ....        | 10            | 10     |
| Tyghadern.....      | " E. ....                 | 20            |        |
| Telfer.....         | " B. F. ....              |               | 10     |
| Tally.....          | Signora.....              |               | 5      |
| Testaferrata.....   | " Baronessa.....          | 15            |        |
| Tregosa de Mad..... | ".....                    | 5             | 5      |
| Thornon.....        | Sig. r. W. H. ....        |               | 10     |
| ".....              | Signora.....              |               | 5      |
| Topping.....        | Signor.....               |               | 5      |
| Toole.....          | Signora.....              |               | 5      |
| Torelli.....        | Signor.....               |               | 5      |
| Testaferrata.....   | " E. del Marchesi.....    | 10            | 10     |
| Volget.....         | Sig. r. Henry.....        | 20            | 10     |
| Vella.....          | Rev. Sig. Pad. Mass.....  |               | 10     |
| Witncom.....        | Sig. r. C. ....           | 20            |        |
| Wilson.....         | Rev. Sig. S. S. ....      | 20            | 20     |
| ".....              | Signora.....              |               | 15     |

|               | Diaz no.             | Contributions |        |
|---------------|----------------------|---------------|--------|
|               |                      | Scudi.        | Scudi. |
| Walker.....   | Sig. r. William..... |               | 15     |
| Wood.....     | " William.....       | 10            |        |
| Wough.....    | " John.....          | 20            | 25     |
| Whitmore..... | Signora.....         | 20            | 10     |
| Warren.....   | ".....               | 20            |        |
| Witton.....   | Sig. r. John.....    | 10            | 10     |
| Woo'y.....    | " Robert.....        | 10            | 20     |
| Wool.....     | " John.....          |               | 10     |
| Wesley.....   | Signora.....         | 20            |        |
| Ward.....     | Signor.....          | 10            |        |
| ".....        | Signora.....         |               | 10     |
| Watson.....   | Sig. r. John.....    |               | 5      |
| Zammatt.....  | Signor.....          |               | 5      |

N. B. — *Farie Donazioni di somme miseri di Dieri Scudi non state ricevute che non si trovano registrate nella precedente Lista.*