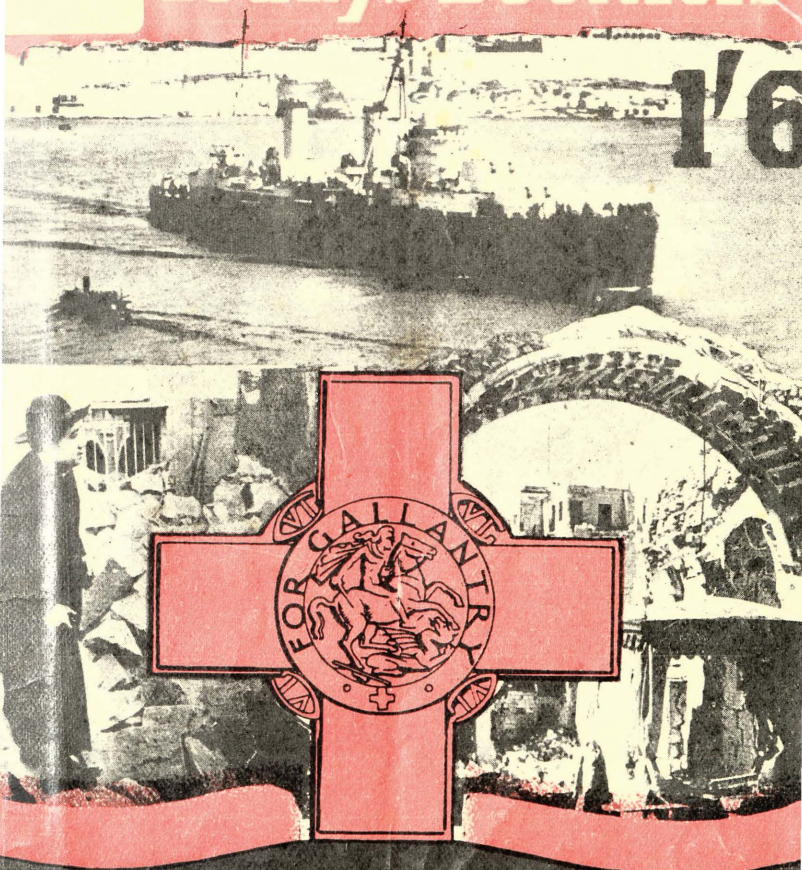


Today's Booklets"

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MALTA CALLING

ZX, GE, A ANTHOLOGY OF MALTESE WRITERS

.B. 176

G ed by
RON
GRINDEA



Foreword by
CARDINAL HINSLEY
Archbishop of Westminster

Presented by Mrs. L. St. John

23/3/54

TO-DAY'S BOOKLETS

Edited by MIRON GRINDEA



MALTA CALLING

Foreword by

CARDINAL A. HINSLEY

Archbishop of Westminster

PRACTICAL PRESS LIMITED

1 Dorset Buildings, Salisbury Square, London, E.C.4

For permission to translate and publish the work of contemporary Maltese writers included in this Anthology, the editor is gratefully indebted to Lt.-Colonel A. Agius, Trade Commissioner of the Malta Government, and Professor G. Aquilina, editor of "Gems of Maltese Literature."

Made and printed in Great Britain by
WATMOUGHS LIMITED, IDLE, BRADFORD, YORKS.

FOREWORD

IN times past I have often asked myself why Maltese are so passionately attached to their island? Why are they so loath to leave it even for a few years? Why is absence to them always exile, even though they may be in pleasant places abroad? The answer comes to me from the pages of Malta's long history, and from all her traditions of faith and culture. Few, if any, places on this earth appeal so irresistibly to the memories that link the peoples to their homes. Can any other spot boast of the like associations which bind the spirit of men to the land of their fathers and to the hearths which are warm with the love of kin? Storm after storm from all points of the compass have age after age burst on the rocks of Malta; they have served only to root more deeply the sturdy faith and the undying charity of its people. In these simple homely pages of Maltese literature will be found witness of the attachment of the people to their native land, to their language and to their faith. Malta! mankind is your debtor. Everywhere your heroic endurance will always be an inspiration. You have given and are giving to the world an example of the courage born of faith. Your brethren in all the earth will be mindful of you in your sufferings: they will mingle with their prayers for your relief, gratitude for your example of unflinching loyalty.

A. Cardinal Hinsley
October 21st 1942

MALTA INVICTA

*Malta shall not be won; in vain her foes
Athirst for blood strike with relentless hand.
She in the name of truth and freedom stands,
Her hope in God—and God shall be her strength
Her walls lie shattered and her people slain;
Trusting we look beyond the evil night
To see the sure triumphal morning dawn
When joyful victory shall there be crowned.
Her breast-plate is of steel; she joined the fray
With God-inspired fearlessness and might.
And with her heroes' blood she seals the vow
Never to bow to bondage of her foes.
In all the bitter cruelty of war
Her strong heroic stand shines unsurpassed.
With aim united and with iron will,
She fights, defending freedom and her life.*

M. Caruana Curran

ELEGY

(To Anthony, aged 11, a victim of German
methods of warfare.)

*No violets spread
A carpet for the fairies dancing on your grave,
But ruins dread
Enclasped your tender limbs, smoke veiled your eyes so
brave.
So brave they were
They shone with the fire of runners before the race;
The angels fair
Plucked rose-buds for your cheeks and blessed you with
their grace.
Not this, I thought,
Short tragedy would mark your part on life's full stage;
Your earthly lot
Seemed calm and happiness increasing with your age.
Whom the gods love
They give not wealth nor laughter, but the martyr's cross,
And from above
You surely grieve that we bewep your mortal loss.*

P. P. Saydon

MY COUNTRY'S LANGUAGE

*Among all tongues, O thou, my country's tongue,
To rival or surpass thee none I find,
Bereft of thee, my soul is like a mouth
Benumbed, which tries to speak, but no words come.*

*Rich in your poorness, in your smallness great,
Through thee my thoughts find utterance, and my heart,
Death will I meet with thy soul on my lips,
As he unlocks the gate of worlds beyond.*

*For thou art full of childhood memories,
Of days when I would frolic with my fellows,
And run and skip, exchanging blows and laughter,
Or scale some rocky cliff with nest as prize.*

*And thou art full of Malta's memories,
Of days when she was everywhere renowned,
Till she and all her splendour fast were welded,
Though there are ever some who would despoil her.*

*Through thee come all my thoughts; as when I see
A torn dress fluttering gaily in the fields
Where some girl digs the land; and as she toils,
I see how strong the arm which drives the spade.*

*Through thee come all my thoughts; when by the sea,
Safe on some rock I lie, and watch the moon
Which like two rays of silver moves above me,
Shining, conversing with the clouds and silence.*

*Thy voice speaks to me when the sparrow sings,
Perched on a branch's tip, with drooping head,
And when it flies away, still shall I hear
That sigh of "Malta" I have always breathed.*

*Among all tongues, O thou, my country's tongue,
To rival or surpass thee none I find;
Bereft of thee, my soul is like a mouth
Benumbed, which tries to speak, but no words come.*

*Through thee I am Maltese, as by the flag,
Her colours red and white which I salute.
Thou gav'st a great and noble heritage;
My thoughts and all my heart to thee I give.*

Translated by JOSEPH SULTANA and ANN BURGESS.

THE SONG ENDURES

I STOOD between childhood and youth; the sun of gentlest April sparkled on the waves of the sea—the sea which embraces this island of my heart, blue as indigo. The sylla in flower crimsoned the earth; in the fields the young corn grew green, and I was drunk with the perfume of the orange trees in blossom. I took the path winding between river and fields; the breath of the zephyr softly kissed my brow. And in this unsullied happiness I fell gradually into a dream—dream of light and perfumes, dream of love which knows not doubt.

My face was a star.

As I lay thus rapt, in this sweet slumber, the angel of poetry came down from the sky, and with lips lighter than the warm breeze, blowing at sundown from land to sea, kissed my cheeks and said: "Poetry is your portion, the beauty spreading through creation is your empire, your wealth is in your heart and in your thoughts." Was it joy? Was it fear? A tremor ran through my veins; and like the spark which is struck from flint, a desire flamed up in my heart and has never died.

And I sang.

I sang with the song of the canary, drunk with love, under the March sun, and the song of the nightingale in the darkness of a tranquil night. I sang with the song of limpid water, which wells from a stony rock, falling and rippling, before it is lost in green fields, tilled by strong arms. I sang with the song of the breeze in the leaves of rushes and trees, or with the song of our native sea, at rest in her banks on an untrodden shore.

O, wonder!

Scarcely had my song, rising from my soul on wings of verse, flown from my mouth, like a bird from its nest, but it went on its way, light as a cry of joy, not towards towns, filled with corruption, but into the space, mid green fields, and blue sky; and it blended in perfect harmony with the twittering of birds, with the scent of river and field, with the breath from the nostrils of cattle, which smokes, white, in the cool of the morning, and with the myriad colours of grasses and flowers. And with them it arose, wave upon wave, to the clouds, passing beyond the clouds and the blue.

And I seemed to hear from the depths of ages forgotten, from the ruins of cities once the heart of the world, crystal

voices, which sang with golden words the form and glory of creation. Voices of dauntless men, who in the story of suffering mankind saw, not the force which destroys, but the power which renews, the power which brings forth the great from the little, from the great the better, even as the grain, through death, brings forth the ear; wise men, who in the path of life did not curse the briars along the rugged way, but stepped beside them and with unshaken hope, in the hour of dishonour looked for the dawn, however distant, of salvation. . . . And these voices of days gone by, of poetry, as if called up by a new love, mingled with my voice, and with all the other voices.

Now my life begins to decline.

Fifty-six winters have passed over me, each ravaging a furrow in the field of my life. Time has drawn on my brow, and on my hands, wrinkles which multiply and darken; my hair is white, my eyes have lost their lustre, my steps grow heavy . . . signs there is no deceiving! The tide of my blood does not flow as of old, pure and plentiful from the heart to the limbs. The spirit is willing, but the brain does not always respond to the call of the will, and the song dies, alas! at its birth.

With every day the end draws nearer.

This hidden force which overthrows and destroys what life builds, which wears away to dust the works of art, does its unceasing work around me; it works, though it makes no sound, transforming all things. When the light is gone from these eyes, and on a black and frozen night there dies the fair beauty of creation, striking my heart with wonder, it may be that on the tomb enclosing my body, not a tear will flow, and no flower fall from a hand which knows the sweetness of loving and remembering. And men, cold-hearted and heedless, may pass, without one look at the grave of the silent poet.

But the song does not die.

From beneath the stone of the forsaken tomb, still it will rise, uncorrupted, the melodious wave formed in my heart in the dream of my youth; in a new realm it will unite with the songs that I sang in my loveliest days.

The voice of the poet echoes the voice of creation; the man inspired speaks not of his own accord; as the harp resounds when supple fingers run over the well-tuned strings, so does the poet vibrate, when touched by the hand of God. Messenger of the Good, mirror of the Beautiful, his word is celestial, and what is of heaven knows not age nor ending: the poet dies; the song endures.

Translated by ANN BURGESS.

THE PRIDE OF MALTA

*And would you know who gave you the power
For toil, your lively mind, your gift of tongues,
Whence comes your loyalty unto your gods,
Your love of home?*

*Your race gave all, race of a long full past,
Which lofty stood among the lands of old,
And cradled Europe's wisdom and her glory,
In ages long forgotten.*

*Look then about thee, go to Malta's temples,
See figures hewn upon the giant stones,
And marvel at them, hearing strangers saying
Their beauty stands alone.*

*Go down into the tombs of our fore-fathers,
See there the treasures buried with the dead;
Look well how they are fashioned, for to-day
Such art is all forgotten.*

*If you would know who were its masters then,
And who impassioned by such love of beauty,
Who could set up what time could not destroy
In all the flight of years.*

*The answer will I give, for you must learn
All things that will at last awake your pride.
This is the work of Maltese men of old,
Men of the far, forgotten age of Stone.*

*For through the ages this your race has shone,
God-fearing, yet with mind in endless quest,
And quick to learn, all onslaught she withstood;
She knew no bondage.*

*O brother, write this lesson in your heart,
Among the loftiest nations Malta stands;
Let us not seek with foreign pomp to deck her,
Enough her native glories.*

Translated by ANN BURGESS.

THE IMNARIA SHOW*

PIETRU was counting. He stooped down until he could almost touch his peaches, but didn't because that might spoil them. Thirty-nine, forty, forty-one—that left five over from the three dozen in case of accident. A strong wind might arise—the “mistral” of St. John was proverbial—or they might mature and rot before their time.

For four years running Pietru had gained a prize at the annual show of the L'Imnaria and now his fruit had attained fame. A loud voice interrupted his musing: “How are they getting on, Pietru?”

He started, but recognised the owner, so did not bother to turn round.

“Not so bad,” he answered cautiously.

“Stop fiddling with that old plant and come along here. I've some rare tobacco. Bought it in town this morning.”

“Smoking must wait till work is done,” he answered sententiously.

His neighbour tried another tack: “I read the most extraordinary news in the paper to-day.”

“Papers,” Pietru snorted contemptuously. “Nothing but politics. I'm sick of newspapers.”

“This has nothing to do with politics. It is about a new pest which has come to Malta. Some imported fruit was infected. It is a tiny worm which devours fruit.”

Pietru uttered a loud exclamation: “Another enemy! It is impossible to compete against them.” His anxious look seemed to see worms boring through the fruit already.

“There is only one remedy. I can explain what it is if you come over.”

“I am coming,” he answered eagerly and stumbled hurriedly over the field which separated his neighbour's plot of ground.

“Ha, ha,” laughed the other when he arrived panting and hot. “Fetched you that time. Can't be bothered with your friend any more? Only peaches—peaches—peaches . . .” Pietru stared incredulously: “Do you mean to say it isn't true?”

“Course it isn't true. I only wanted to have a chat with you . . .” Pietru scowled; he turned to go back, but thought

*The Feast of St. Peter and Paul, June 29th, is kept with great ceremony at Notabile. The Feast is also known by the name *Imnaria*. On that day there is an agricultural show at Boschetto. The prizes are given on the morning of the show.

better of it. It seemed silly to be resentful because a terrible pest did not exist. He hailed Gianni instead: "Water that tree, please, and don't wet the fruit."

"Where's Carmelo?" answered Gianni.

"I asked *you* to water it, not Carmelo," grumbled his father.

"I can't be late," said Gianni sullenly. "Paolo and I are going to Dingli for the tomato seed. . . . Has he come home?" he addressed the last words to his father's friend.

"I don't know," the other laughed good-naturedly. "So you are friends again—good."

Gianni and Paolo were close friends when they were not bitter enemies. As they were both lads of hot blood, this latter was frequent. Luckily they were both busy. Paolo carried his father's produce to market and Gianni worked in Pietru's field. In the evening they met for excursions just as the fathers met to smoke and chat over old times. Carmelo was Gianni's younger brother—aged nine—a fact which Gianni did not let him forget in a hurry, for he bullied him on every possible occasion into doing most of the work.

I said that Paolo and Gianni were friends, but Paolo was something much more to Carmelo. He had always admired Paolo secretly. Since the day he had rescued him from a flagrant piece of aggression on Gianni's part, he had hero-worshipped him whole-heartedly. He thought that no one drove a cart so well as Paolo, and then the way he sold his produce was marvellous.

Carmelo's one dread was when the two elders fell out, because he always took Paolo's part and was terrified lest Gianni should find out. Also he felt it an act of treason to his family.

A few days later his worst fears were realised. Irony lay in the fact that Carmelo himself was the unconscious cause.

It fell out this way. Pietru was laid up with one of his usual bouts of rheumatism and left stringent orders for Gianni to water his orchard. Gianni immediately pressed Carmelo into his service and wisely left the hardest work to him. About six, Paolo walked to meet his friends and found Carmelo staggering under an enormous bucket of water. This was not the first time Carmelo had been given work beyond his strength and Paolo lost his temper.

"Your father is a brute to give you that work." Gianni, who had been directing operations from his seat on the wall, now strolled up nonchalantly.

"Father never ordered him to do it."

"Then you should have stopped him."

"I ordered him to do it."

"Then you are a brute." This was too much—in front of the kid, too.

"Take those words back."

"Shan't!"

"I'll make you."

"Come on!"

Paolo was stronger though Gianni looked bigger. Besides he kept himself fit by hard work and Gianni did not. In a few minutes the latter had had enough and Paolo pushed him away angrily: "I'm sick of the whole lot of you. Father says he can't get a word out of Pietru but bubblings of his peach tree—I wish to goodness a storm would destroy the fruit!"

Next afternoon Pietru managed to hobble as far as his "beloved." Was he dreaming? . . . At last he gained control of his voice. "Gianni, Carmelo. Come here immediately." Pietru watched them intently as he pointed to the stripped peach tree. Their astonished faces left no room for doubt. Gianni spoke first. He was red in the face. "The skunk! I never thought he would do it. . . ."

Pietru seized him roughly: "What do you mean?"

But Gianni had recovered himself: "Ask Carmelo," he said sullenly.

"No, no; I know nothing," cried Carmelo. It all seemed a hideous nightmare. Pietru eyed him severely. His quick denial only gave him away more.

"Didn't Paolo forbid you to water the tree yesterday?" said Gianni.

"Only because the bucket was too heavy."

"And afterwards . . . I think I heard him say that he wished the fruit were destroyed," Pietru interrupted with a scream of rage: "Did he say that? Answer me at once I *shall* have justice."

"Yes," faltered Carmelo after a long hesitation. Then he rushed to throw himself down under a tree in despair. He had given witness against Paolo and, what was worse, his hero was guilty! Paolo, why did you do it?

At last new and better thoughts came. What right had he to jump to conclusions before Paolo had time to clear himself? No, no; he wouldn't believe until Paolo acknowledged it. He couldn't have stooped to such a mean act. . . .

By the evening all the village had heard the news. Anna, whose shop served as grocery, stationer's, etc., held forth to an astounded audience: "Yesterday Paolo and Gianni had a fight—not their usual quarrel—but a big fight like men. Paolo was beaten. He was a mass of bruises—all covered with blood." . . . Some of the audience knew this could not

be true as they had seen Paolo go off to market; but one must let a good raconteur tell a story in her own way.

“ Paolo was furious. He swore that he would destroy Pietru’s peaches, which always gain a prize at the L’Imnaria Show, and this morning the tree was stripped—not a peach left! Later on, all heard how Paolo’s father had hit his son who was taller and stronger than he and could have knocked him down if he wished.

“ That proves his guilt,” they said. “ But his father must be careful—there are limits which cannot be passed.” Paolo thought so, too, and when he was called a thief and a liar he walked out of the house. This was the climax—gradually the news filtered through that Paolo was staying with a cousin until he could obtain a passage to America.

For two days the people talked of nothing else; then, as usual, a bigger excitement claimed their attention. SS. Peter and Paul’s feast approaching and the Imnaria Show would open to-morrow. . . .

The neighbours were no longer on speaking terms. Each viewed the coming feast with jarring feelings. . . . Pietru was determined to remain indoors now that he had no exhibits to send in. Gianni was feeling too ashamed of his part in Paolo’s accusation to wish to appear in public. Paolo’s father, dazed and taken aback at his son’s attitude, felt an ever-increasing resentment against his neighbour.

And Carmelo? Carmelo waited for the show with all the determination and eagerness of one who leads a forlorn hope. He had spent his last pennies in buying a small picture of St. Paul, which he put in a place of honour in his room. There was a faint chance for the vindication of his friend’s honour, . . . if he did not succeed—but surely St. Paul would not fail to help him clear his namesake.

*

From early afternoon a stream of traffic filled the road to Boschetto. In the morning these carts had been laden with exhibits. The newest and most obsolete types of conveyance were there, from the smartest saloon-car of the Committee to the smallest donkey-cart made gay for the occasion with coloured streamers and rosettes. In between there ranged every variety of vehicle. What matter the type so long as one arrived, and, again, what matter the absence of vehicle?

“ Boschetto is hardly a mile from Rabato,” said the attractive Maria, one of the village belles, “ and best clothes get so crushed in carts.” She stepped out swiftly and gracefully with that swinging movement from the hips which all the peasants acquire. Her red handkerchief contrasted well with the dark colouring of her smooth hair, and her black eyes sparkled with unwonted vivacity to-day.

On arrival people set about enjoying themselves until the Committee had finished judging. Surreptitious peeps through the gates of the shed only revealed a mass of colour. The band was tuning up—soon a blast of music filled the air. Little booths had been set out where one could buy lemonade or “coloured” drinks, others offered “noughat” and “crocante,” huge slabs with sticky sweets, studded with nuts, which looked like bits of rock. Little boys sold “pastizzi” in baskets, monkey nuts and “carawat.” No one need be bored while waiting.

When the gates were at last thrown open, Carmelo was the first to slip in. Now that his idea was to be put to the test, he dreaded disappointment. At last he managed to squeeze his way to the front of the fruit-stalls. Huge melons, luscious grapes, golden apricots, purple plums, strawberries. . . . He viewed them disdainfully—at last, peaches.

He examined each group minutely and then almost let out a scream. There they were—marked second prize because some of the fruit was over-ripe. He might have guessed that they would gain some kind of prize. The audacity of the thief staggered him. You may wonder how he recognised his peaches. Ask anyone who has his own fruit tree whether he cannot pick out his variety anywhere?

He scanned the better-dressed people eagerly. A tall gentleman, taking notes, caught his attention. Surely one of the Committee. He was really a journalist looking for “copy,” and Carmelo could not have acquired a better ally.

“Please, sir, who sent in exhibit No. 410?”

The man looked amused: “May I have the pleasure of your acquaintance?”

“I am Pietru’s son, Carmelo. Pietru’s peaches always gain first prize, but this year they were stolen. No. 410 are ours, stolen and sent in by someone else.” The man looked sceptical.

“That’s a big charge to bring against anyone. You must be careful.”

“That is why I came to you, sir, one of the Committee.”

“Well, I’m not on the Committee but I shall do my best. . . .” He strolled along until he met the person he wanted. They scanned the entries together. No. 410 sent in by G. Spiteri, 14 Sda S. Luigi, Rabato. “That seems correct.”

Carmelo was called: “It’s a lie,” he asserted boldly. They were taken aback. The youngster made very sweeping statements.

“ You must prove this.”

“ Two women live there. I often pass the house and have been in to sell vegetables.”

“ He seems pretty certain,” said the journalist. Later a policeman was sent for and he corroborated Carmelo’s statement.

“ You are right so far,” they conceded. “ Our next move must be to-morrow.”

Next morning an excited Carmelo was ensconced behind those presenting the prizes. Would 410 never be called? At last. A lad of eighteen came up to receive the prize.

“ Are you Giuseppe Spiteri?”

“ No, sir. He is ill. I am his cousin.”

“ Is this his address?” He was shown the entry.

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Then I suppose he is lying ill in this house?”

The boy had answered boldly, but now a slight hesitation betrayed anxiety.

“ Of course, sir. I visited him yesterday.”

“ Well, I should like you to visit him again to-day in company with a friend of mine,” was the dry reply as he beckoned to a policeman in the background. The lad was thunderstruck, but he suddenly espied little Carmelo who had risen in his excitement, and realised that all was up.

It had been such a simple plot and fortune had favoured the accomplices from the start. The idea had not even been premeditated, but came suddenly to one of the lads who happened to be passing when the fight took place. What could be easier than to put the blame on Paolo? We know how everyone thought him guilty. Another stroke of luck was their knowledge that all the Agricultural Committee had been changed that year. This led to some carelessness. The mistake was to give someone else’s address. . . .

That night the two families united at a festive supper in honour of Paolo’s return. The latter pulled Carmelo’s ear: “ So you refused to believe I was guilty, eh?”

Carmelo looked his happiness, then he drew a deep breath. “ Oh, I believed at the very beginning,” he confessed bravely. He added hurriedly: “ But I made up afterwards, didn’t I?” Paolo’s reply was interrupted by a loud laugh from Pietru.

“ It has only just struck me,” laughter overcame him again, “ that my peaches got a prize after all!”

TREES

O beautiful trees,
Strength of creation, solace and life,
Beautiful trees,
That lift our hearts in song,
That mitigate the evils of our souls,
That fill us all with joy and love and hope
There in the depths of your shades
Suffer me to lie and breathe your peace.
Hide me, guide me
In the paths of oblivion. Let me forget
The sorrows unceasing, the tears in our hearts,
Falsehood and sin,
And all things.
This is my great desire,
O beautiful trees; this is my prayer.

Up in the blue sky the sun in his glory
Shines over field and meadow, over the tranquil
Wave of the cornfields, which
With every summer breath
Ebbs and flows in a green tide;
It shines on the stream which melodious flows
To water the flowers of May.
It shines on you,
O beautiful trees,
While I rest in your peaceful shade.
Over my head unbroken
Is the murmur of the leaves. And one by one
They fall from all your branches.
Slowly they fall; in quivering flight
They spread themselves about me.

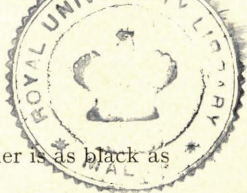
Thus, thus, O trees, my happiness is fallen
In the springtime of life; therefore I come
This morn to you.
For they gave me life, who laughed and wept,
With my mirth, with my tears;
And she who awakened love, and left me,
Scorning my fears;
And he, with friendship's art
Who eased my aching heart;
All these
I have seen falling like your leaves,
Beautiful trees,

FORT ST. LUCIAN

(Elegy)

*The sun has set, and in the rosy clouds
Left a deep silence aching at the dark;
Religious peace came rolling with the waves,
And on the Fort—the bulwark of old days—
Cast her sweet mantle white, and on my heart.
Dark is the air; the virgin silver light
Of fair Diana packed away the clouds;
While on the solitary hill at sea,
Saint Lucian casts his eyes on all the Bay.
Think'st thou of ship-wrecked days of old, perchance?
The iron-breasted heroes tumbled down,
Their eyes were beaming with eternity,
And their pure blood around Saint Lucian Fort
Have sown the brave and youthful blooming souls,
Saint Lucian! Oft in the calm days of spring
I hastened my weak steps, and then bewept
Thy state, more woeful than the wreck of trees,
'Midst shaggy sedge and water-courses bright.
My sorrow—twisted string of my squeezed heart—
Of staunch remembrance spoke and of great deeds,
Of knights, of virgins rushing on their foes,
Of reddish moors and of blue-reddish sea:
Of glorious, undefeated arms it spoke,
And of brave heroes shedding their own blood
To have more strength. Were all thy visions these?
From thy strong top came whistling to the ground
Thy fatal arrows, like the sparks of light.
There at the window spread with eglantine,
Women with faces pale in great dismay,
Attend the longed return of their brave sons,
Whose bloody arms the Turkish yataghan
Has gashed; they wait in vain their husbands' call,
Who, like a drop on the white hyacinth,
Died mixed with the brave heroes of strange lands.
O noble Fort! To the ethereal world
Thou sendest souls from thy cloud-kissing top;
They spread from high the seed of the most brave
And send on the free pinions of the wind,
The song of heroes, to their native land:
The last adieu of their eternity,
The blooming virtues of their noble souls,
The Christian valour of their deeds. Adieu!*

THE ASSASSINS



“YOU know,” said Santu, “how my father is as black as a farthing’s worth of liquorice.”

“Oh, is he?” I replied, interested.

Santu’s father has been on previous occasions, either as black as a cat or black as a pair of black shoes. The “farthing’s worth of liquorice” was new.

“Yes, he is,” went on Santu, beaming, “but not always. On Sundays and Festas, when he washes with soap, he come out as white as fresh milk. That’s because he is a coalman.”

I was working in my little back-room on the ground-floor whither often Santu came to regale me with his stories.

“Of course he is!” he encouraged himself to go on. “He loads coal on to ships. That’s his job. Sometimes when it is very late and pitch-dark and everyone has blown out the lamp and even the oldest people have gone to sleep, when only the street lamps are still burning. . . .”

Santu stopped to take breath.

“I have told you how when I came out of hospital I never could get to sleep: that’s how I came to know all about it.

“Well, at night, when it was as late as I was telling you, Mister Chich, who is not a *Mister* at all, only his nickname, comes out at the top of the street and shouts:

“‘Brothers! A ship. Brothers! A ship, a shi-ip!’

“Then all the coalmen open their doors and walk out, one fastening his braces, one tightening his belt, knocking at the doors of those who haven’t heard and calling ‘A ship has come in.’ Then crowding down the alley they take the road to the Marsa, hurrying as if it were going to rain any minute and they were afraid of getting drenched.

“Now I shall tell you about that blessed night after my father had quarrelled with some men at the wineshop. I don’t know what it was about, but those were very low and savage men, and they had even drawn their knives. When it was very late we heard voices calling: ‘A ship,’ and then a knock at the door with ‘Hey, Saver’—that’s my father—‘Come down. A ship.’

“‘A ship, indeed!’ said mother ‘They will be waiting for you at the door?’ But father would not hear and mother kept saying: ‘You won’t go. It is *they*. They have come for revenge, Ahima. Ahima, do you forget you have a wife and children?’

“My sister Tesa—the one who has such hair that it looks like a faldetta—awoke and started crying and pulling my father by his flannel shirt.

“ You know how these things happen: Father opens the door ”—Santu opened an imaginary door—“ he comes out hurrying. But a man has been waiting all the time like this ”—Santu flattens himself against the wall and tightens his lips—“ then ‘ ving ’ goes his knife into my father’s back.”

“ Horrible!” I said.

“ Oh, no, because nobody went out that night. Only my mother spoke to the assassins from behind the door. ‘ My husband won’t be coming out to-night. He is very ill,’ said she. ‘ Go, friends, and pray for him.’ Then she said ‘ Sahha to you,’ but no one answered. *They* were afraid we should recognise the voices. But we were all frightened till morning.”

“ And what happened next day? You called in the police-sergeant?”

“ No, no. Next morning in broad daylight my mother went to the pump to fetch water and she saw the coalmen coming home all black from their work, and when she got back she called my father to tell him.

“ ‘ There *was* a ship last night, Saver,’ she said. ‘ I saw the men coming in as I went to fetch water’.”

“ So that it was not the *enemies*, after all, who had knocked at your door that night,” I said, starting to collect my tools.

“ Oh, yes, it was! *Enemies* and assassins,” replied the little man hotly. “ Who else would want to dig a knife into my father’s back?”

Joseph Aquilina

THE PIPER OF THE VALLEY

*I know a piper piping all the time
Amid the reeds that murmur in the Vale,
A tune of mystery, pleasure or of wail,
Woven of flowers that are the sweetest rhyme.
Here in this Valley, undefiled by crime,
Where at the eve the missel-thrushes hail
The fainting twilight like a maiden pale
He never craves the mounts that others climb.
But those that love the muse of rugged heights
Where eagles build their eyries and the winds
Recount their wild adventures upon earth
Love not his song. Still unperturbed he finds
Enjoyment down the vale where days and nights
Fill Life’s gold-lidded casks with springtime mirth.*

FOLK POETRY¹

What a night it is, what a beauteous night, as if 'twere the Eve of Christ's birth! You hear the music of the guitar-players, and from the window where you stand you come to the door.

The guitar is a sweet instrument—a magnet of maidens; it soars to the heights and sinks to the depths like a magic spell!

Look down to me beloved—down from your roof-top; look with smiling lips down to me, and with a guitar in your hands!

Beloved play the guitar, and I will come behind you with a bass-viol in my hand!—Alas, what shall I do if I find not my joy with him!

It seems as if a mouse had crept into the guitar of my beloved. If he has no one to catch it for him, then I will come and catch it for him!

You, the guitar-player, play me a tune, that I may sing two songs: one for you married women, and another for you maids!

How I love the symbal!² How beautiful it sounds through the night. I passed by your window, but you were asleep and you heard not a sound!

I cannot sing to the symbal, bring me rather guitars! And if you have cast me out of your heart, I beseech you take me in again!

Whither did they fetch me to sing to-day? Beneath the window of my beloved! I stand without, she stays within! How shall I then have patience?

Whither did they fetch me to sing to-night? Within these four walls! The younger maid truly is fair; but the elder carries the palm!

They bade me come and sing on a boat from over the sea. I cannot sing in Italian, for I am a village maid!

They bade me come and sing; how do they know that I am a singer? I have sung but once in my life, at the Feast of Saint Paul at Sakkayja!

The siren has come up from the sea to sing; her little sister is with her! Come forth, O maidens, come forth, that you may hear her voice!

You play and I sing: so does our life pass by! You grow and I grow, and love grows with us!

Be not afraid, O dearest. Let not your heart be afflicted—my little brother shall wed you soon! For he has a

1. These peculiar quatrains have been sung for centuries, in the street, at a window, or in popular gatherings, often to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. See also page 54.

2. Old English name for hurdy-gurdy.

player's cunning, and he can sing still better: and he will
 drive all sorrow from your heart!
 Could I but know that you would hear me, many the songs
 I would sing you; from the depths of my heart would I
 take them for you, dimming your eyes with tears!
 I would sing like the men of Valetta, like the men of Isola I
 would play the guitar, I would pursue love like the men
 of Borgo, and faithful as the men of Rabato would I love!
 I know all songs; shall I sell you a dozen or so? I will allot
 them to you, six at a time, as we walk through the arches
 of Floriana!
 I have sung, and still I sing; I played guitars and still I play.
 And when I have had my fill of this world, I shall love no
 maiden more!
 Oft have I sung, and still I sing. For I pledged my life to
 singing. My heart has worshipped two maidens—Carmen
 and Philomena were they!
*Oft have I sung and will sing yet more, for there lies no
 dishonour in singing! But there lies dishonour in this, that
 a noble girl talks to young suitors!*
*I have gone through all the songs in the book; now I will
 sing by heart, and will sing a song of my beloved—so
 he will have peaceful slumbers!*
 Sing, maidens, sing! Why all these bashful looks? For
 whence we came, thither must we return. And as we
 found this world, so we shall have to leave it!
 Sing, maidens, sing! Do not be coy before this young man.
 For the young man here is a worthy youth. What he
 hears in this place he will tell no further!
 Sing, maidens, sing! We have two guitars for each of yours.
 How I love your voice as you sing in the night.
 Sing, maidens, sing! Do not fall silent because of me. I
 like to listen, still better to see, and best of all to embrace
 and kiss.
*If you wish us to sing, then let us sing; bring here a chair
 and sit by me. You cannot challenge me in song, for with
 my own hands I fashion my songs.*
*If you wish us to sing, then we will sing. If not, we will rest
 satisfied. For people are not as once they were; they are
 all of them ready to find us at fault.*
 Ay, let us sing a song, my love, let us sing it both together;
 I would, O best beloved of my heart, that you loved me
 half as dearly as I love you.
 I came to-night to sing to the rhythm of the castanets. Tell
 me what ails you. Your heart is troubled. How sad you
 appear to me.
 How shall those who hear me sing to-night say that I am not
 drunk? But the wine is in the barrel, and I perish with
 thirst for a single drop.

Those who hear me sing to-night will think that I am mad.
Mad am I not at all, but overflowing with joy from my youth.

To-night I come to sing, for my heart has long been laden, for the sake of a Maltese soldier I would wed, who day and night betrayed and sold my heart.

Had I known that you had made a swing, I would have come at noon. Now I have come at the hour of the Angelus—but I have left my song at home.

How I long to sing—but it is better that I sing nothing, for people are not as once they were. They have nought but scorn on their lips.

I open my mouth and sing a song—let us see how I shall end it. If I continue well, I will go on with it—if badly, what will become of it?

How much I sang in bygone days, when I was but fourteen! Now am I grown old, and I have fallen silent. I long to sing, but cannot.

How long it is since I sang a song! My tongue has lost all use. Alas! what shall I do, poor wretch, if I may not enjoy thee?

I know not, I know not what has befallen me; I know not what strange thing has befallen me. Before I was seized by this cruel love, what a beautiful voice was mine!

Where is the voice that once I had? What a lovely voice I once possessed: I could awake the sleeper, heal the sick.

How I yearn to-day to sing! but my voice fails me. Get me a piece of sugar-candy or a malted sweet-meat.

If I were not hoarse to-night, I would sing you a number of songs: I would tear them out from the region round my heart, and dim your lovely eyes with tears.

Yea, let us sing a song, my love! Beneath the wild fig-tree let us sing. The song that you produce, however, is like the braying of the she-ass!

O what a voice you have—like a bug in the straw! If you are unable to sing, then burrow a hole and bury yourself.

Go hence and hang yourself on a bitter almond-tree, with all the songs that you know! With my money I buy and sell you—with my songs I pour scorn upon you.

Now I have sung all songs. One song alone lingers still in my mind; this will I sing to my beloved and bring him sweet slumbers this night.

I bid you good-night and feel that my heart is in the greeting. To-day you have heard my voice; say: "Who knows if I shall ever hear it more?"

I have made now an end of my songs, for I have just finished my fiftieth one. Now I bid you good-night; I shut my book and go in.

To-day is the Eve of Ascension Day. The men of Valetta take their boats out to sea. The basket of cherries stands on the brides' table.

When we went to Melleha there were twenty-one of us. We took the brother-in-law and a bottle of Kosoli.

This year I shall not go to the fair. This year I shall go to the boschetto and will buy red apples and hang them on to the little ass.

The Feast of Mary is here. What a feast the people of Dingli will have! They have no adornment for her (for the statue of the Mother of God): They have decked her with wild gourds.

Now we have reached the end of the year: I await my New Year's gift from you. A gift not from your pocket, but from your mouth, from your poppy-coloured lips.

Our Malta was the first created thing: our Malta will be the first thing to perish. Arise, beloved, give me a kiss before Death starts a-mowing with his sickle.

They have set me to work as a serving-maid in the baron's household. It is enough for him to buy half Malta, and surround it all with cannon.

I live in the Strade Reale; in the window I have a flowering plant. But it is not the roses that I love, it is the girl who waters them.

The Slavs are leaving Malta—but how many broken hearts they leave behind! As they sail from the harbour, a voice in their heart cries out, "Turn back again!"

The Norwegians are leaving, too. What mourning among the girls! Each of them leaves behind him at least six tearful maids.

The Norwegians are Paladins. They are like angels—I do not jest. The name of one of them is Karl—I have never seen a fairer man than he.

If Karl should ask a kiss of me—which so far I have granted none—though I should be thereby at fault, I could not, I swear, refuse him.

A carpenter is a bunch of lilies, the seamstress is a bunch of roses. Shall I tell you what a cobbler is? Just a slipper clattering round and round.

I would not wed a carpenter, for he would cut me in two with his plane. He leave his bread upon the shelf—I am am hungry, and he will give me nothing to eat.

I would not wed a carpenter, for he would straightway prepare a coffin for me; he would put it under my bed, and say to me: "That is for you when you die."

Marry me, mother, marry me—marry me to a young English officer, for a Maltese demands a dowry, and I have none.

My love is a Maltese soldier; instead of one button he has two. He has a sword-strap over his sash, and looks like a child of two.

My heart is given to a policeman: how deep it had to drink of sorrow. He lies down drunk at night, and wakes up in the morning out of humour.

My heart is given to a policeman, but I like policemen no longer. For he would end by hanging father and mother, with never a twinge of remorse.

You thought to marry a sailor; but a sailor is never by you—he is always away on some ship, some Albania, and well may you say that he is no husband at all.

The bird is half of gold and half of feathers. As soon as I see a girl I long for her: how would you ever have me be a priest?

My mother left me a fortune, but I drank it away, and spent it all in dissipation. The bishop would not grant me the right to read the Mass: I had a missal, but I tore it to pieces.

I would not wed a huntsman, for he has a yellow hue, and he is always ailing. Then I should have to be his serving-maid, forever running to and fro for the apothecary.

Not everyone who shoots and finds his mark is a true huntsman. But a true huntsman is my lover—he knows whither the birds will always fly.

A right proper huntsman is my love—how well he understands the arts of hunting! His every shot flies to its mark—and down from the window he shoots a maid.

I am the cook of the finest sauce. No one cooks as well as I! I wish you would but taste of my sauce, so that you see it will not kill you.

My love is a gardener in the garden of streams; he guides the water through its channels. Now his fresh strawberries are ripe, and he shares them out as presents.

“O, gardener in the garden of streams, have you a tender root of turnip?” I know of one, but it is still young, when it is big I will give it to you.

See how bright the moon shines; it gleams in the air and lights up the ground. Come forth, O maidens, come forth, ye flowers of love. Ye flowers of love, sell me a seed of love, that I may sow it in my heart, and a little lemon-tree will spring up. My little lemon-tree has come up, and I beseech you now to water it. But see that you do not pluck it. Beware, for you have plucked it already. See—and what shall I do with it now? I take it in my hands and cast it down from the city-walls. From the city-walls I cast it down, before your beauteous eyes! If this should

rouse pity in your heart, I will go and lift up the little tree, and give it into your hands.

I sat by the window, combing my hair, and a comely youth passed by. He smiled at me, and I at him; I would fain have smiled for ever.

The mother of my lover died, leaving him young and yet unreared. Now he is grown to be a youth, and has entered on the path of love.

Up and down the street you go. Already you have worn your shoes to shreds. This is either the beginning of love, or the beginning of dalliance.

I piped to you and you would not hear; I would fain address you but you will not speak with me. Now I must shoot.

Seven stars stand in the heavens. Three of them are dear to me. One the sun, another the moon, and the third the dawn of love.

My heart slipped into your heart like a drawer into its place. I know you not, you know not me. Whence, then, is this trustfulness come to me?

My heart has entered your heart, and there came a noise like the noise of an earthquake. How quickly it entered, and yet came out again so slowly.

O, how full of sweetness is my heart, as though I had eaten caramels. When my heart first loved you, I was but fourteen years of age.

The rose is hidden among its leaves. My heart is closed up to everyone, only to you it is opened wide.

How slim and slender you are! You look like a needle in a case. Everything you wear becomes you—your watch-chain included.

How slender and dainty you are—like a jeweller's balance! Take care that our love be not known. You must ever deny it, and I will confess nothing.

How broad is your chest. You need a yard and a half for your waistcoat. Your eyes are the adornment of your face; buttons are the adornment of our waistcoat.

How your strength rejoices me! Your two arms are branches of the chandelier, are pillars. I beg you, jewel of my heart, I conjure you in the name of God; why will you kill me?

O, fairest lady of the world, what wondrous eyes you have! Your mouth is dainty and full of tenderness. Be not sad, O jewel of my heart. It is for you that I do grow.

You, with your cheeks red and white like the rose—and how lovely the lily looks there in the midst. He who loves a married woman is like the thief who goes forth to steal.

I will put a spell on the crown of your hat I will ordain that you shall love me alone, forgetting all other lovers.

I will make you a white dress, and with it a pinafore red as fire. I will not take you to see the fireworks, for you are afraid of the bangs.

You always wear a dress of white, but what do you put on on Sundays? You are a bride the whole year through, but it never comes to the wedding.

My lover has dressed himself in black, as though a friend had died. Nay, but his dear mother has died, who reared him with her milk.

Laced boots, white stockings, straw-coloured gloves on your hands. If I could turn into a dove to-night, I would come up and stay two hours with you.

O you with the cigarette in your mouth—beware that you do not burn your lips. For from your lips it will spread to your face, and even set your lovely eyes aflame.

The snake crept up my sleeve, and shewed its teeth and bit me. Open your eyes and look at me; see what love has brought me to.

I felt sick, and near to death. Doctor, what do you prescribe? Prescribe a pretty girl for me, and let her walk round me all day long.

My heart is a diamond-ring in a jeweller's window. The love that I have for you, my jewel, none can explain to me.

Two birds sit in a cage and give each other good advice. One says: "How can I escape?" The other: "How shall I fly away?"

Lay your hand in my hands. Embrace me and I will embrace you. Soon the hour will come when you will make me glad, and I will be your joy.

Lay your hand in mine, sealed fast like a letter. You who have borne the weight of my body, woe to you that now you make it suffer.

My love, I must away and depart between two and three o'clock. My love, I ask one favour of you—be calm until I come.

Where is my love? Where is he? Alas! who knows where he may now be found? He may be found between sky and sea, and he battles with the oceans.

Pezzolato died of four Raviolis: his mother mourned him and his father caressed him.*

The sea has its pretty fishes, the country has its lovely green, the woman has her handsome husband, and the maid must have her love-affair.

Heart of my heart, Grosomnia, I will be your gardener. I will gladly toil with all my strength, and water your garden—it is enough for me if I may rejoice in your flowers.

* An Italian dish, sort of macaroni.

The straw rustled; an old woman had a son. She called him Ferdinand, but the priest would not baptize him. She fed him on oaten bread, so that he would study as a doctor. She fed him on bran bread, so that he would learn good behaviour. She fed him on rice so that he would learn to blow a powerful blast.

What a rustling the grasshopper makes in Liberata's little box. What a rustling the mouse makes in Maddalana's!

Peace and Peace. Our Lady at my head. Our Lady hides me, and Christ conceals me.

I am a young country-girl, and grew up in the mountains. My life is never-changing. I guard the cattle in the fields. I tend the melon-field and the fig-trees, and often chase thieves away. All about the field I go, making the round like a sentry.

My sole companion is my dog, who sees that no one steals from the field. When it grows light over towards Zurrico, I know that I must go my way, down from the threshing-floor.

Eight o'clock—"Yoke the oxen!" and I busy myself harnessing my pair. If the sun begins to beat too cruelly, I hide from him on the threshing-floor.

I put my hat on my head, to give me a little shade. Soon I see my mother coming. She brings me food in her hands. She has tied it all in an old kerchief. A warm dumpling of wheat and barley meal, a piece of tunny-fish, and four onion, or two little cheeses or two broad-beans.

When the sun sinks, I bring my oxen behind me and lead them back to the stall, and feed them and give them to drink.

Green cabbage, white cabbage, cauliflower, everything that the earth brings forth I cut as soon as it ripens, and take it with me to the stable.

My mother has finished already, and saddles the she-ass. Then we call to the neighbour's son, and send him with the green-stuff to market, so that it may be sold.

The young girl looked out of her window, and basked a little in the sun. When she saw me, she withdrew into her chamber; how would you have me go on living?

My heart is a rock in the midst of the sea. The waves beat endlessly against it. There is no young maiden in the world who would not love him who loves her.

I was a serving maid with fine people, and would always go to market with my basket. One smiled at one, another winked at me, and O, reverend Father, how many sins I committed!

I begged Saint Nicholas for a blessing. He gave me two fine gifts, one pock-marks on my face, the other a red rash.

I will never, never take a wife, I am so well off in my mother's house. But if, perchance, the devil should seize

me, I will take a girl of Valetta. But if I will have no girl of Valetta, because she puts shoes on her feet, I will go four paces further and take a girl of Hamrun. If I will have no girl from Birchicara, because she works in porcelain, I will go four paces further and take a girl from Balzran. And if I will have no girl from Balzran, because her feet are forever walking in the red dust, I will go four paces further and take a girl from Lia.

Once upon a time, there was a boy who fell sick. He said: "Mother, fetch the doctor! The doctor from the hospital, and a roast pig, and a bottle of wine. To hell with the doctor!"

My lover came down the street. He whistled at the door, but I had work to do, and could not go out, but the memory lives in my heart.

My love lives at the corner of the street. How well his complexion matches mine! When I was seen speaking with him, how his mother scolded him!

My love must go far away. What shall I do that I may go with him? When he sails out of the harbour my arms shall be his rudder.

My lover has two eyes. How shall I get them away from him? I will play a game of skittles with him and steal his eyes away by moonlight.

My lover has two watches outside his nankeen suit. When he comes in at the door I make his coffee ready.

And now I bid you good-night; for we must depart. Have patience for to-night. Another time we will stay the whole night through.

Joseph Cauchi

A GRAIN OF SAND

Where the blue billows kiss the fretted land

Sweet chance it was, that wandering I saw
So small, so great, a thing—a grain of sand.

Silent I stood long pondering in awe.

And thought I: Once perhaps in ages past

This grain of sand beneath waves salty lay,
Until a furious wave mighty and vast

Did swing it round and round right in my way;

And how the life of man from his first day

Till when he must for e'er go to repose
Is swung, too, round and round by passion's sway
And racked by Time like to the storm-nipt rose.

"O sand," quoth I, "if man had not a soul
I should have said that thou didst act his role."

EVENING FALLS

*At eve the team, is freed of plough or wain,
And turns from toil unto a well-earned rest;
The thrush is flying to his distant nest
And scattered sheep are driven home again.
The weary workers on the neighbouring height
Cease from their toil, and homeward slowly throng
The farmer's daughter tunes her last sweet song
As gloom falls deeply with the hush of night.
The hillocks slowly sink and fade away,
Like gorgeous visions in a dream sublime;
The village bells ring forth their evening chime,
And from the sky dies out the light of day.
Each mother listens as her children's feet
Move to the door her good man new to greet.*

THE ROLLING SURF

*The rolling surf upon the dreary shore
Beats loudly all day long with mighty sway;
Around the lonely reef the billows roar,
Whilst evening dims the silence of the bay.
Along the shore I walk at eventide
Where solitude my spirit fills with gloom;
The setting sun behind the far hillside
Is plunging slowly down its watery tomb.
The drowsy hawks upon the rugged reef
Look dim moving ghosts as darkness falls;
The singing thrush beneath the faded leaf
A pleasant memory to my mind recalls.
I feel the terror of the gnashing waves
That rush upon the shore with frightful speed;
I gaze upon the dark and narrow caves
Wherein I hear the splashing of the weed.
At evenfall what sudden fears arise
When tempests through the dark air break anew!
Chill horrors seize me from the wrathful skies
Whilst dimness falls upon the wide sea-view.
What awestruck thoughts the surf bring to my mind
As passing clouds conceal the rising moon!
With throbbing heart alone I roam to find
A kindred soul, with my own to attune.*

*The rising tide moves up along the sand
While gloom and sadness fill my heart with dread;
And whitening mist comes up to hide the land
Where buried lie the noble silent dead.*

*The shining stars that glitter in the sky
My shaking spirit fill with peace again;
For Thou Whose love has set those worlds on high
With that same love my weakness wilt sustain!*

WAR

*Behold the brave steeds on the battle-field
Rushing like a mighty flood,
Upon the greedy foemen who, concealed,
Wait to drench the earth with blood.*

*Behold the brave men on a foreign ground
Broken and unfit to stand
Against the strife and horror that are found
Here in this dire distant land.*

*Whilst fearful battle breaks at dead of night
Heroes! rise and play your part;
The stars will lead you with their friendly light,
Guns can't chill a mighty heart!*

From LYRA APOSTOLICA.

ST. PAUL AT MELITA

*Secure in his prophetic strength,
The water peril o'er,
The many-gifted man at length
stepped on the promised shore.*

*He trod the shore; but not to rest,
Nor wait till angels came;
Lo! humblest pains the saints attest,
The firebrands, and the flame.*

*But when he felt the viper' smart,
Then instant aid was given;
Christian! learn hence to do thy part,
And leave the rest to heaven.*

From L'Emigrazione Maltese, Anno IX, Martedì 7 Marzo 1876.

Roger Scicluna

AUGUST

*Hot is the Summer day, limpid and bright;
The sunny skies with coloured rays are rent,
And merry birds their joys sing on the height,
Whilst breezes waft the fruit-trees' lovely scent.*

*The blossomed trees with cheery carols teem,
From larks outpouring melodies most sweet;
The morning stars ere sunrise brightly gleam,
Along the shore I walk with aimless feet.*

*Among the shady vale the country lass
With joy and love attends her feeding sheep;
The tranquil sea is like a looking-glass
That brightly shines beneath the rocky steep.*

*I watch the merry bathers in the bay
Where summer life is full of joy and bliss;
Down in the pools the white swans dip and play—
There's beauty all around on morns like this!*

*The farmer's dogs howl at the morning skies
With barking that disturb the solitude;
The lanscape fills my heart with sweet surprise.
Afield, the workers throng in happy mood.*

*The fragrant flowers spangling the grassy lawn
Anon revive all that is dead in me;
How sweet the lovely stillness of the dawn
For one whose heart is steeped in hopeful glee!*

Oliver Azzopardi

FALLING EARLY

*Like one that carried by the driving blast
Ever at random without stopping goes,
So under the black skies I hurried past
The grey trees, that, the wind abating, rose
Up high to heaven. But, when the air
Renewed its threnody, I saw them stoop
Almost prostrating, just as men whom care
So batters as to make their spirits droop.*

*And some there were that, with the moaning gale,
Lurched down and could not rise again. They sank
Senseless beneath; so under Chance's hail
Men fall, yet feeble, each a broken trunk.*

*And this I thought; amidst the hissing sound
I also may drop tree-like to the ground.*

SWEAR TO TELL THE TRUTH

IT was the day when Dolor had to appear in Court in connection with some chickens that had disappeared from the backyard of Mr. Piet some months ago. She put on her best Sunday frock and, accompanied by two or three neighbours, left for the city, so that at nine she would be at the Law Courts. As they reached the Puturjal they bought themselves a dozen cheese cakes, and before the clock struck nine they were in the Kistlanija.

What a crowd in there, and what a commotion in those dark chambers! Dolor's head was swimming. People coming in, people going out; some arguing and gesticulating; others, with hands in their pockets, reading notices on the wall. Some were smoking, others whistling; a few smiling and a good many grousing. Dolor found herself in the swirl of people, her *culqana** cocked on her head like a boat in a stormy sea.

She and her friends were making their way in, though none knew exactly where to go and what room to enter. They jostled the crowd and the crowd jostled them in turn. They thought themselves extremely lucky, however, when, leaning against a door on the left, they espied Paul, the village policeman. They all stopped and clustered around him, and asked for some information as to where they had to go and whom they had to see.

Paul told them they would have to wait until called for. They did; and, at last, after an hour's patient waiting, a sergeant came out of a door with a paper in his hand and shouted: "Dolor Kasha, Dolor Kasha."

"That's you, Dolor," her friends told her, because she didn't realise it was her name that had been called. Pushed by her friends, and encouraged by Paul, who led her by the arm, she found herself in the hall where she had to give evidence.

This hall, too, was crammed with people sitting, and next to one wall, behind a sort of gate, she saw Nazju, nicknamed "Il Girby," standing alone with folded arms as if he were in church. In front of him was a table with people sitting all round it. On the left, the village inspector was turning over and discussing a paper with the sergeant.

Sitting high on a big chair, in the centre of a platform, something like the one they put up in the church for spiritual exercises in Lent, the magistrate, wearing big black-rimmed spectacles, resembled a sleeping brooding hen.

* *Faldetta*, a characteristic head-dress made of a strip of cardboard covered with black silk.

The sergeant helped her to a narrow platform opposite the inspector. A short man in black rose from his table and, putting a small bronze cross to her lips, said: "You swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God." Then he went back and sat down. Dolor was more concerned about the unpleasant look which Nazju was directing towards her.

"Will you look at me, please?" said the magistrate.

"What is your name?"

"Dolor," she said.

"Your surname?"

"Kasha."

"What do you know about all this?"

"I know nothing."

"What have you come here for, then?"

"I came here because I was brought here; otherwise I would have stayed in the village."

"Dolor," said the inspector, "do you know Nazju over there in the centre?"

"Of course I do. His mother is my godmother and he is our neighbour, next-door neighbour."

"What do you know about what happened to him?"

"Has anything happened to him? I never heard."

"What do you know about him, then?"

"I don't know anything wrong about him."

"Don't you know that Mr. Piet has had some chickens stolen and that later these were found at Nazju's place?"

"I heard something of the kind, but I didn't see him pinch anything."

"Did you not see him one morning going home with a sack over his shoulders?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, one morning as I was coming from the first Mass, I saw Nazju with a sack somewhere near Mr. Piet's orchard."

"Had you any idea what was in that sack?"

"How can you tell what's in a closed sack? I am not a witch."

"But what would you have thought it contained—cabbages, flour, stones, or something living?"

"Whatever it was it certainly moved; but I don't know what it was."

"Did you say anything about Nazju to Maria, nicknamed Ta'Lewzu?"

"I don't remember; I may have said something."

"Remember that you have sworn to tell the whole truth. Therefore see that you remember what you told her."

"But, dear me, dear me, my memory is no good. I don't remember."

"Here," the magistrate butted in, "I'm going to send you down; then you might remember."

"But, I say, has that chatter-box, Maria Ta'Lewzu, told you anything?"

"That is none of your business."

"You just tell the magistrate what you told her."

"From what I can see, Maria has been letting her tongue run away with her. This is all I said to her some time ago: 'Do you think,' I said, 'do you think those chickens were stolen by Nazju? One morning, at daybreak, I saw him with a sack over his shoulders near Mr. Piet's orchard, and he ran for home. But Nazju is not that sort'."

"You see how you remembered at last," said the magistrate. "Let me read what you have said, and then you may leave."

As she was moving out of the Court she came face to face with Maria Ta'Lewzu, and were it not for Paul, the policeman, who planted himself between them, she would have sprung at her. Dolor, crimson with fury, sweating all over and gesticulating to illustrate her state of mind, at last burst into tears. . . . "That damn' woman, that chatterbox, that unbeliever. . . . It's me she should come and talk to. I shall not rest until I've taken her Adam's apple. You wait till she comes out."

Paul realised what was growing, so he called his mate and asked him to take Dolor out quietly and without fuss and leave her with her sister-in-law, who ran a shop in the Narrow Street.

When she got back to the village, the first thing she did was to give Maria Ta'Lewzu a good piece of her mind for repeating what she had heard from her. She carried on and fussed as she had never done before, until Maria's people interfered and returned Dolor's abuse with heavy interest. Dolor's greatest grievance, however, was that although she had sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, she hadn't got enough brain to deceive the magistrate.

Tony, the sacristan, did not need any go-between to pass his opinion of her, but faced her fair and square and told her she had sworn falsely, because she had tried to cover up Nazju's misdeeds.

"That's because I am conscientious," she replied. "My mother always used to say, 'I shield you, you shield me until death comes and takes me.' As for me, whenever I can shield anybody I don't hesitate to do so."

"This is the best I've ever heard. So, if you hadn't whispered anything to Maria and told her what nobody else but you knew, you would have shielded Nazju. After kissing the cross you couldn't do any more shielding. Your business was to say everything you knew about what happened."

“Get away with you,” said Dolor, who apparently could not find a suitable retort. “Besides, whoever asked you to poke your nose in the matter? Why don’t you go and do your duty by the Church and light the oil lamps?”

“You are quite right, daughter, as the less one has to do with people like you the better. You ought to be in Kordim* by rights. Good-bye to you.”

And bursting into laughter he turned and left her.

Grinding her teeth with fury, Dolor left for home. Yet among her neighbours she insisted she never told a lie in her life.

* Kordim—prison.

A. H. Caruana

THE EVENING BREEZE

*I rise from depth of coral waters
When heat is doused by distant seas,
I bid good-bye to Neptune’s daughters,
Then flit unsteady across the leas.*

*At first I steal through furtive shadows,
And then embolden to abreeze,
I pitch my strength ’gainst grassy meadows,
And flap the sail athwart the quays.*

*I whistle through the copse and coppice,
I glimpse the rabbits scuttling home,
I softly part the yielding poppies,
And then I gently further roam.*

*I dust the nooks of belfry towers,
The spires I encircle fast,
I mutter by where darkness cowers,
I linger to the very last.*

*I sough between the grave-yard’s crosses,
And rustle through the eerie gloom,
I weep o’er tombs of bygone losses,
And then soar fast o’er trees that loom.*

*I wend my way, through silent valleys,
And spatter o’er the lanscape dew,
I murmur where the brooklet dallies,
And skim along its placid blue.*

*I frolic through the night unending,
Far through the night I gambol free,
At last I totter, lull, descending,
Fall, fainting . . . My grave’s the sea*

Joseph Aquilina

GHAWDEX*

To Wilfrid Barbara-Fielding to whom Malta is a country of pleasant memories.

*God bless thy beauteous name, my native Isle,
Island of "dghajsas" girls and dainty fruits,
For though [^]thou hast not Thames nor wizard Nile,
Nor giant trees that spring from knotty roots,
Nor blue-capped mounts, nor evening-splashed falls,
Nor flute-voiced forests, gems and woodland birds,
Nor subterranean gold in cavern-halls,
And lakes and meadows for the countless herds,
Yet thy blest memory shall endure with me
As light from Heaven thrown upon my way:
The memory of thy hills and of thy sea,
The poet's exultation that shall stay.
O what care I for things that thou hast not,
Thou art my Home, sweet Home, thou art my lot.*

*An island four miles N.W. of Malta. Pronounce ow-desh. "ow" as in "how."

RIDDLES

A boy who beats his mother. (Bell.)

It is black and spits red. (Gun.)

It is a goodly length; cut a little round piece from it and lay it in a little basket. (Sausage.)

Seven maids run after one another. None can catch up with the next. (Windmill.)

Red as fire, yet no fire; water springs from it, yet no spring. (Water-melon.)

It goes everywhere, even on the Emperor's roof. (Fly.)

Wool outside, wool inside. You need seven folds of wool for it. (Hooded cloak.)

All the night hard at work—at rest all day. (Bed.)

A box in which you find hundreds of the finest pearls.
(Pomegranate.)

A basket of pears. It is turned face downwards, but nothing falls out. (Bell.)

A ruby box, full of pretty things. (Pomegranate.)

Cold as snow, and red as fire. (Tomatoes.)

Mat upon mat, and yet no mat. (White cabbage.)

Translated by E. W. BROCKMAN.

THE "MANDERAGGIO"

Manderaggio is an Italian word meaning "pigsty." It is just the sort of term that the condescending Knights of St. John would—in the arrogant consciousness of opulence—have hit upon for the congeries that goes by that name. The place itself is the site of a plan that went agley and an enduring monument, mutely bearing eloquent evidence of the truly cavalier attitude of the Knights towards the Maltese.

For the building of Valletta, stone for the many edifices was quarried from the spot which is now the Manderaggio. The resulting pit it was proposed to deepen to below sea level (in fact, parts of the Manderaggio are actually slightly below that level), to effect communication between the pit and the harbour and to turn the creek thus formed into a dock or haven for the galleys of the Order. The Knights were eminently practical. This neat plan of theirs was twofold in its object. It afforded them cheap stone from a handy quarry and it enabled them to use the consequent gap as a safe anchorage for their precious navy.

This ingenious project partly failed. It is true that the Knights got all the cheap stone they wanted; but their fears of an early return of the Turkish armada prevented the consummation of the plan. The building of Valletta had to be rushed. The original idea of a Valletta almost at sea level, with streets and squares worthy of a modern European capital was abandoned. Mount Sceberras, on which the city was raised, was hardly disturbed. The bastions and fortifications were hastily erected, to this day they stand—a tribute to Vauvan's genius. The quarry on the Northern side of the town remained a hole in the ground. But the resourceful Knights soon found a use for that hole. Their financial acumen enabled them to turn a dead loss into a profit, almost as cleverly as would a twentieth century magnate. They set the jerrybuilders of the time to work upon the place and set up . . . a "pigsty" for the populace.

The Manderaggio remains, as it was originally built, a slum. There are other slums in Valletta, but none of them started life as such. The tenements of other slums are clustered round some dilapidated mansion—a bygone palace that has sunk to the unsavoury status of a modern rabbit-warren. The Manderaggio alone was built as a slum, though not a slum in the ordinary acceptance of the word.

One of the definitions of the word "slum" given by the Oxford Dictionary is: "a district of squalid or wretched character." Such a definition is not wholly applicable to the Manderaggio. Architecturally speaking it is squalid enough. But surely the inhabitants of a district lend their colour to it? Manderaggians cannot conceivably be described as

“wretched” for they are not the really poor and destitute. Nor does the place shelter the lawless element of the town. The Government doctors and the Parish Priests will corroborate this seemingly rash assertion.

In our “pigsty” of a slum many of the small town traders pig it hilariously. They contentedly crowd their not inconsiderable families into a few cramped rooms, even though many of them could afford to rent a house on the Sliema Esplanade. The dwellers in the Manderaggio number many small capitalists—people with quite a few thousands in the bank and, possibly, a country place in which to summer. They live there because they were born there; their fathers lived and died there; their children will grow up and stick to the old roost. The case may be cited of a well-known merchant, now deceased, who had been a Manderaggian by “birth and up-bringing.” His ever-increasing wealth made it incumbent upon him to climb out of the Manderaggio. So he rented the big house that his new position demanded of him and saw to it that it was in one of the thoroughfares which bound the slum and that all its back windows gave directly on to the rookery in which he first saw the light.

The Manderaggians are the Bohemians of Malta. They have a zest for life and generally bubble over with high spirits. They will certainly never turn aside from a spree. Of a Sunday, in gregarious clannishness which extends to umpteenth cousins and furnishes unimpeachable advertisement for the resiliency of car springs, they will hire charabancs and (in the case of less sedate) seven-seaters and will proceed in their thousands to gormandise the far from inexpensive contents of the capacious hampers with which they have taken care to provide themselves.

The Manderaggio itself is hardly interesting. Even the pens of Thomas Burke, Arthur Morrison, Eugene Sue and Israel Zangwill do not make slums attractive, except in their repulsiveness. If Valletta may be described as a city of steps, the Manderaggio is Valletta—only more so. To get to the heart of it you go down some eighty steps. Steps lead up or down to dwellings. There is no such thing as a level stretch of pavement, there are sure to be steps halfway—if they have been inadvertently omitted, you will find them at the first turning.

There are three different ways into the Manderaggio. There are also three ways of getting out. “Obviously,” the reader will say . . . till he finds himself inside, when he may not feel so cocksure about this. He may, for instance, turn a corner in the belief that it will lead him out of the maze, to find himself in an overpopulated greengrocer’s, whence, even if he does not make a purchase, he will carry forth part of the stock.

You can never be sure what you will find at one of the Manderaggio turnings, and their name is legion. If you are lucky, you may (always turning corners) find yourself in the

thick of one of those Manderaggio rows, to which—as much as to its lace—the Island owes its fair name. The Neapolitans ask you to die after beholding their city. You will not die if you butt into a couple of Manderaggio litigants (who, by the way, are almost invariably female) but you will certainly get very dirty. On such occasions dutiful offspring have been known to come to a parent's aid with the family garbage pail. For this popular stroke the pail has to be firmly jammed down on an opponent's head and shoulders. As a weapon of offence the garbage pail may not be so formidable as the broken gin bottle beloved of certain ladies from Whitechapel: in inexperienced hands the effect of such an "extinguisher" is likely to prove more far-reaching and disastrous, also, to the bystanders.

In spite of the defects of its construction, it must not be imagined that the Manderaggio is dirty. As might be expected, the Sanitary Authority keeps a watchful eye over it and there is more scavenging and hoseplaying done in the locality than even in the main streets of the town. Yet the Manderaggio boasts a population of five thousand, not including live stock—dogs, cats, poultry, donkeys, and, of course, goats. Though there probably is not one kitchen sink in the place, the by-ways are reasonably clean. The inhabitants, too, are clean, and it is no uncommon sight to behold mothers resolutely washing their struggling young hopefuls and even indulging in a sort of half bath themselves at one of the several public fountains. In fact, only a normal quota is contributed to the sickness returns by the Manderaggio. For a good many decades the slum has not been the centre of epidemic. The last one they had was about a hundred years ago. Then they did the thing in style—they went in for plague.

Lastly, the Manderaggio has figured in literature. Jules Verne, the friend of our boyhood, describes it in his *Mathias Sandorf*.

G. Muscat-Azopardi

MOUNT CARMEL

*Mountain bathed in the sun-
light
Green with the vineyards,
Sharing your slopes between
Sweet fruits and roses!*

*First radiant witness
Of God's mighty purpose,*

*You saw the fair dawn
While yet brooded the night!
For your lonely prophet*
Held fast in his sight
The vision of Bethlehem;*

*Mary he saw
As she lulled in her arms
The Childhood of God.*

* Elijah.

Ninu Cremona

SPRING SONG

All that remains to me is hope; I find her
A soft smile on her lips, in Spring's forgiveness.
My head finds rest, as were I gently cradled. . .
O, may the hour so longed for quickly come!

In this my life bowed down with bitter anguish
I long, before my eyes do find the vision
Of peace, of sunlit joy, I long to dream,
To dream, awaiting Hope in the beyond . . .

And from the clouds at last she will come down;
Crowned with a rainbow, clad in fairest white,
Walking in verdant paths; in her strong arms.

This brow, with nightmares fevered she will take . . .
Then in a wondrous sleep she will enfold me
On the soft pillow of a tiny child.

Guze Delia

SUNDOWN

One evening in Spring—of our loveliest Spring,
You remember it, brother?—we stood on the terrace
Alone; the sun sank on the peaceful horizon,
There breathed warm and gentle, the soft wind about us.
All things slowly were drowned in the calm of the silence,
The Ave alone rang through field and through village.
In the gathering darkness, oppressed, you said, "Brother,
The dying sun pierces my heart with its beauty."

Your face was lit up with a heavenly smile;
Your lips moved, and it may have been words that they
uttered:

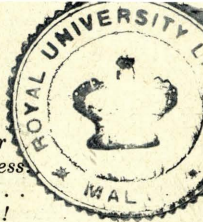
Thus smile the angels, I thought, when in Paradise
They greet one another with hearts full of gladness.

You stood thus in ecstasy rapt, as the sun
Sank into the waves; earth drew round her the shadows;
In the gardens the last of the singers fell silent;
And night then, at length hastened down from the mountains

Not many days passed, and Death's heralding angel
Covered you o'er with the shade of his wings . . .

And as in that evening you smiled on night's coming,
Thus did you go—rose of May's lovely prime.
With the passing of heavenly wings I heard mingled
Mysterious strains of the sweetest of music.

Translated by ANN BURGESS.



George Zammit

SYMPHONIC MOMENT

To Mrg. Ant. Muscat.

*Midday,
Sunday,*

*What harmony of bells!
It assails the clouds that float,
It invades the skies remote;
What shrill bliss in every note
Pulses, trembles, swells!*

*Time, hoary chief,
For whom all human grief,
For whom all earthly joy
Is nought save a toy,*

*Speak, speak, speak.
Art thou in truth a king,
Because to thee do cling
The mighty and the weak?
Art thou a monarch that
surveys
With eyes serene and calm the
many ways,
The tides and ebbs un-ending
That are ceaselessly bending
The weary shoulders of the
illusion-girth
Firmament, sea, and earth?*

*Old, old, wert thou when
still,
Upon the craggy summit of
this Hill,
The ocean billows roared, and
sea things grew,
And with their kind did live,
fight, and woo.
And from the rozy depths,
there came,
With tremulous vigour, fierce
with hissing flame,
And staring, deathly chill.
The blow that round and
round
Sent the gaping gulfs
profound;
Land and sea and sea and
ground*

*Quickly whirling, wildly
twirling,
While the skies with awful
sound,
Gloomy sheets of cloud
unfurling,
Splashing and flashing,
And shrieking and clash-
ing,
Came down from the
regions
Of mystery, like legions
Whose one savage joy
Is but to destroy.*

*And out of this destruc-
tion, there arose
This, of all island roses, fairest
rose.
And the blind poet disdained
not to throw
His sea tossed Ithacan upon
those rocks,
Unto the magic kiss, the fairy
locks,
The luring, passionate hug,
with love a-glow,
Of the sweet Nymph. Thou
must have grinned to see,
Son ill-begotten
Of Death, the forgotten
Love, pine amidst the silent
horrors of the Cave.
Haunting its phantom self, its
honey-poisoned grave.
But One, Two, Three:
And the music of the bells
That assails the clouds that
float,
And invade the skies remote,
And in the bliss of every note
Pulses, trembles, swells,
From hamlet and meadow and
brooklet and bay
Dissolves, and melts, and
fades, and dies away.*

<p><i>All, with thy torrent passage, thou dost move On towards the gulf of lead- eyed nothingness: Friendship and war, hilarity, distress. There was a Maid, who on the wilderness Of my lone path once showered beams of love . . . Love? How this word, bit by</i></p>	<p><i>the poisonous touch My young, old heart corrodes! And yet, if such My fate be here; if Love, with Light, must go, Take them, dread Sire; 'tis hard; but be it so. And if 'tis not for me the Muse's heights to climb, Take my soul, too, with this echo of heart-sick rhyme!</i></p>
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THE MONKEY WHO KIDNAPPED A GIRL

[FOLK TALE.]

Once upon a time there was a girl: She was cutting grass in the field. A monkey came by, seized her and carried her off, away to the sea. He took the trunk of a great fig-tree, put the girl on the trunk and climbed on to it himself. Then he began to row, and sailed along on the tree-trunk.

At length he reached a country where not too many ships passed by, just one every four years. There he left the girl in the forest while he would go off and get food for her—hens, turkeys and goats; he stole everything he came across, and brought it to her to cook. So she lived with him there, but was forever weeping, and always afraid. She had three children by the ape: they looked half like monkeys, but they had the face of a human being.

One day the monkey had gone off to steal something for her to eat, and she saw a steamer passing. She signalled to it, and the ship sailed towards her; so she climbed quickly on board and sailed away on the steamer.

The monkey saw all this from afar; he cried: "So she has really managed it! I must run after her." And he began to run, but he could not reach her. Then he began to tear out his hair, and to cover his face with his hands. Then he took the three children and tore them in pieces, and thus revenged himself by their death.

RIDDLES

Something you do not want to enter, but into which you must go by force. (Coffin.)

Something you snatch at with five fingers and seize with two. (Flea.)

Something that works at night and rests in the daytime. (Lamp.)

APPENDIX

Miron Grindea

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Malta (*Melita*, Land of Honey, Flower of the Sea, Flower of the World)—a mere speck on the map of Europe, is certainly nothing but a speck on the map of world literature. It is, however, no small privilege to witness the steady, confident growth of a newly-born literary movement! Roots begin to take hold, shoots appear, and one looks forward to the first stems with eager anticipation. It is like taking part in a biological process. From the first steps of a new literature, one senses the eventual creation of a mature work of art.

It has become commonplace to say that the emergence of this tiny piece of earth as one of the main bulwarks in the defence of civilisation is a source of continual inspiration for the present generation. Malta's iron endurance in the face of the most appalling odds ever ranged against a small community has found its proud place in the annals of our time. But the epic of Malta cannot be written, and perpetuated, until that great to-morrow, for which mankind now fights. The poet who sings the tears and turmoil of to-day will extol the unyielding stand of these indomitable people full of fire, tenacious in their opinions and deeds, in the face of the incessant raids destroying homes and treasures of art. It may be from Malta itself that the poet will spring, for the heroic scale of the present conflict cannot fail to inspire her sons.

At all events, it seemed to us that the best tribute we could pay to Malta now was to bring this first Anthology of Maltese writers before the English reader. For, as far as we know, although there is an original Maltese literature of more than fifty years' standing, no previous collection has been made in this country.

Real Maltese literature started towards the end of the last century while scholars and grammarians were still disputing as to the origins of the Maltese language. The opinion generally held was that after the Phoenician, Greek, Hebrew, Saracenic and Aragonese-Sicilian influences, of varying intensity, with a predominating Latin influence in schools from late mediæval times, Maltese must be considered as a dialect of Arabic. Under the influence of Italian propagandists who wanted to prove, at any price, that Maltese was a branch of the *lingua di Dante*, the Maltese intelligentsia convinced herself that the very idea of a Semitic origin would be slanderous, since Malta had been European throughout its history and had embraced Christianity even before Rome. The maze of uncertainty surrounding the origins of the language is perhaps best illustrated by its having no less

than twelve different systems of spelling between 1791, when Vassali published his *Grammatica melitensis*, and 1924, when the *Ghaqda* (Association of Maltese writers) settled down to the task of enriching their language—no matter what its origins—using the alphabet which is now prevalent in public and private usage. The struggle has been hard and impassioned, but, to-day, the Maltese can claim to have their own literature.

Under the editorial guidance of Professor Dun Saydon and Professor J. Aquilina there have been published, between 1936 and 1940, three compact volumes entitled *Ta' Qari Malti* (Gems of Maltese Literature) which speak of a promising generation of novelists, short story writers, and especially poets*. Being one of the purest Arabic languages, Maltese possesses an exceptional wealth of poetic imagery. Much of the population is illiterate, but folk poetry has an immemorial tradition. Though not all the Maltese could claim to be poets, they all have a very strong leaning towards this type of writing.

*

The main characteristics of Maltese writing, so far as it can be judged by the works of the present generation who consciously created a national literature, centring chiefly round the literary magazine *Lehen-il-Malta* (Maltese Voice) and the "Journal of the Malta University Literary Society," are—an exuberant love of the countryside, natural enough to a movement begun with a patriotic impetus—(the head of the Maltese poets, Dun Karm, has made this avowal: "Let us swear, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, that we are and will remain Maltese by our feelings, our faith, our language");—then a naive but rich lyricism, equally easy to understand in people who clothe almost all their actions in poetry; and, finally, a pantheistic religious feeling. The present onslaught could not fail to make its mark on Maltese poets ("Isle of the Triple Cross," by Dom Ambrose Agius, "The Spire," by Chetcutti, etc.), and a few of the poems in our collection owe their inspiration to the "blitz."

Malta has also been a source of inspiration in world litera-

* Guze Muscat Azzopardi (1853-1937) is considered the father of Maltese literature, wrote many novels, among which the best *Nazju Ellul*; Paolo Bellanti, author of the historical novel *Malta Qadima (Old Malta)*; Cachia Dwardu (1858-1907), published many volumes of poetry and prose; Ant. Caruana (1839-1907), grammarian; author of the fine novel *Jnes Farrug*, published in 1899; Father Manuel M. Magri (1851-1907) has left a remarkable collection of folk-tales; An. Preca (1832-1902), poet and short story writer; A. Cremona is known for his volume of poems *Leaves floating on the wind* and for his drama *Redemption of the farmers*; Mifsud Bonnici, died in 1887, wrote much poetry and prose; Sir Themistocle Zammit (1864-1935), historian, archæologist, painted the life of Maltese village life in short stories full of charm. Among the living writers we must note Dun Karm, considered as the finest Maltese poet, P. Cuschieri, philosopher and essayist, Guze Galea, author of the novel *In the time of the Spaniards*, Guze Aquilina, author of the historical novel *Under three reigns*, Guze Bonnici, author of the novel *The power of love*, Gino Muscat Azzopardi, author of the novel *Angels to distress hearts*, Nikol Biancardi, etc.

ture, from Homer up to the present day, and, in the following pages we have made, from the New Testament to modern authors, a short selection of such writings.

Obviously the present selection cannot hope to be exhaustive. Our aim in presenting it was rather to break new ground in the hope that, when war (and paper restrictions) shall be ended, others will take over where we have begun, for here are rich pastures and kindly skies.

*

We could not finish this introductory note without expressing our deepest gratitude to the many experts of Maltese language and literature who have helped us with their advice. Special thanks are due to the staff of the British Museum and to the Rev. Charles Dessoulavy who, by his enthusiasm and knowledge, has sustained us in preparing the material.

ST. PAUL IN MELITA

“ And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmovable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness; for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on the hand, they said among themselves: No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

And he shook off the beast into the fire and felt no harm.

Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.

And it came to pass that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

Acts of the Apostles ch. XXVII-XXVIII.

VALETTA

On the 5th, to the inexpressible joy of all, we reached Valetta, the entrance to the harbour of which is one of the most stately and agreeable scenes ever admired by sea-sick traveller. The small basin was busy with a hundred ships, from the huge guard-ship, which lies there a city in itself; merchantmen loading and crews cheering, under all the flags of the world flaunting in the sunshine; a half-score of busy black steamers perpetually coming and going, coaling and painting, and puffing and hissing in and out of harbour; slim men-of-war's barges shooting to and fro, with long shining oars flashing like wings over the water; hundreds of painted town-boats, with high heads and white awnings, down to the little tubs in which some naked, towny young beggars came paddling up to the steamer, entreating us to let them dive for halfpence.

Round this busy blue water rise rocks, blazing in sunshine, and covered with every imaginable device of fortification; to the right, St. Elmo, with flag and lighthouse; and opposite, the Military Hospital, looking like a palace; and all round, the houses of the city, for its size the handsomest and most stately in the world.

Nor does it disappoint you on a closer inspection, as many a foreign town does. The streets are thronged with a lively, comfortable-looking population; the poor seem to inhabit handsome stone palaces, with balconies and projecting windows of heavy carved stone. The lights and shadows, the cries and stench, the fruitshops and fish-stalls, the dresses and chatter of all nations; the soldiers in scarlet, and women in black mantillas; the beggars, boatmen, barrels of pickled herrings and maccaroni; the shovel-hatted priests and bearded capuchins; the tobacco, grapes, onions, and sunshine; the sign-boards, bottled-porter stores, the statues of saints and little chapels which jostle the stranger's eyes as he goes up the famous stairs from the Watergate, make a scene of such pleasant confusion and liveliness as I have never witnessed before.

And the effect of the groups of multitudinous actors in this busy, cheerful drama is heightened, as it were, by the decorations of the stage. The sky is delightfully brilliant; all the houses and ornaments are stately; castles and palaces are rising all around; and the flag, towers, and walls of Fort St. Elmo look as fresh and magnificent as if they had been erected only yesterday.

The Strada Reale has a much more courtly appearance than that one described. Here are palaces, churches, court-houses and libraries, the genteel London shops, and the latest articles of perfumery. Gay young officers are strolling about in shell-jackets much too small for them; midshipmen are clattering

by on hired horses; squads of priests, habited after the fashion of Don Basilio in the opera, are demurely pacing to and fro; professional beggars run shrieking after the stranger; and agents for horses, for inns, and for worse places still, follow him and insinuate the excellence of their goods.

The houses where they are selling carpet-bags and pomatum were the palaces of the successors of the goodliest company of gallant knights the world ever heard tell of. It seems unromantic; but *these* were not the romantic Knights of St. John. The heroic days of the Order ended as the last Turkish galley lifted anchor after the memorable siege. The present stately houses were built in times of peace and splendour and decay. I doubt whether the Auberge de Provence, where the "Union Club" flourishes now, has ever seen anything more romantic than the pleasant balls held in the great room here.

The Church of St. John, not a handsome structure without, is magnificent within: a noble hall covered with a rich embroidery of gilded carving, the chapels of the different nations on either side, but not interfering with the main structure, of which the whole is simple, and the details only splendid; it seemed to me a fitting place for this wealthy body of aristocratic soldiers, who made their devotions as it were on parade, and, though on their knees, never forgot their epaulets or their quarters of nobility.

This mixture of religion wordly pride seems incongruous at first; but have we not at church at home similar relics of feudal ceremony?—the verger with the silver mace who precedes the vicar to the desk; the two chaplains of my lord archbishop, who bow over his grace as he enters the communion-table gate; even poor John, who follows my lady with a coroneted prayer-book, and makes his *congé* as he hands it into the pew. What a chivalrous absurdity is the banner of some high and mighty prince, hanging over his stall in Windsor Chapel, when you think of the purpose for which men are supposed to assemble there!

The Church of the Knights of St. John is paved over with sprawling heraldic devices of the dead gentlemen of the dead Order; as if, in the next world, they expected to take rank in conformity with their pedigrees, and would be marshalled into Heaven according to the orders of precedence. Cumbrous handsome paintings adorn the walls and chapels, decorated with pompous monuments of Grand Masters. Beneath is a crypt, where more of these honourable and reverend warriors lie, in a state that Simpson would admire. In the altar are said to lie three of the most gallant relics in the world: the keys of Acre, Rhodes, and Jerusalem. What blood was shed in defending these emblems! What faith, endurance, genius, and generosity; what pride, hatred, ambition, and savage lust of blood were roused together for their guardianship!

In the lofty halls and corridors of the Governor's house, some portraits of the late Grand Masters still remain; a very fine one, by Caravaggio, of a knight in gilt armour, hangs in

the dining-room, near a full-length of poor Louis XVI., in royal robes, the very picture of uneasy impotency. But the portrait of de Vignacourt is the only one which has a respectable air; the other chiefs of the famous society are pompous old gentlemen in black, with huge periwigs, and crowns round their hats, and a couple of melancholy pages in yellow and red. But pages and wigs and Grand Masters have almost faded out of the canvas, and are vanishing into Hades with a most melancholy indistinctness. The names of most of these gentlemen, however, live as yet in the forts of the place, which all seem to have been eager to build and christen; so that it seems as if, in the Malta mythology, they had been turned into freestone.

In the armoury is the very suit painted by Caravaggio, by the side of the armour of the noble old La Valette, whose heroism saved his island from the efforts of Mustapha and Dragut, and an army quite as fierce and numerous as that which was baffled before Gibraltar, by similar courage and resolution. The sword of the last-named famous corsair (a most truculent little scimitar), thousands of pikes and halberts, little old cannons and wall-pieces, helmets and cuirasses, which the knights or their people wore, are trimly arranged against the wall, and, instead of spiking Turks or arming warriors, now serve to point morals and adorn tales. And here likewise are kept many thousand muskets, swords, and boarding-pikes for daily use, and a couple of ragged old standards of one of the English regiments, who pursued and conquered in Egypt the remains of the haughty and famous French republican army, at whose appearance the last knights of Malta flung open the gates of all their fortresses, and consented to be extinguished without so much as a remonstrance, or a kick, or a struggle.

We took a drive into what may be called the country; where the fields are rocks, and the hedges are stones—passing by the stone gardens of the Florian, and wondering at the number and handsomeness of the stone villages and churches rising everywhere among the stony hills. Handsome villas were passed everywhere, and we drove for a long distance along the sides of an aqueduct, quite a royal work of the Caravaggio in gold armour, the Grand Master de Vignacourt. A most agreeable contrast to the arid rocks of the general scenery was the garden at the Governor's country-house; with the orange-trees and water, its beautiful golden grapes, luxuriant flowers, and thick cool shrubberies. The eye longs for this sort of refreshment, after being seared with the hot glare of the general country; and St. Antonio was as pleasant after Malta as Malta was after the sea.

*

We paid the island a subsequent visit in November, passing seventeen days at an establishment called Fort Manuel there, and by punsters the Manuel des Voyageurs; where Government accommodates you with quarters; where the

authorities are so attentive as to scent your letters with aromatic vinegar before you receive them, and so careful of your health as to lock you up in your room every night lest you should walk in your sleep, and so over the battlements into the sea; if you escaped drowning in the sea, the sentries on the opposite shore would fire at you, hence the nature of the precaution.

To drop, however, this satirical strain; those who know what quarantine is, may fancy that the place somehow becomes unbearable in which it has been endured. And though the November climate of Malta is like the most delicious May in England, and though there is every gaiety and amusement in the town, a comfortable little opera, a good old library filled full of good old books (none of your works of modern science, travel, and history, but good old *useless* books of the last two centuries), and nobody to trouble you in reading them, and though the society of Valetta is most hospitable, varied, and agreeable, yet somehow one did not feel *safe* in the island, with perpetual glimpses of Fort Manuel from the opposite shore; and, lest the quarantine authorities should have a fancy to fetch one back again, on a pretext of posthumous plague, we made our way to Naples by the very first opportunity—those who remained, that is, of the little Eastern expedition. They were not all there. The Giver of life and death had removed two of our company: one was left behind to die in Egypt, with a mother to bewail his loss; another we buried in the dismal lazaretto cemetery.

From *The Irish Sketchbook: A Journey from Cornhill to Cairo*

Bartimeus

THE CHILDREN OF MALTA

I spent most of last June at Malta when the bombing was beginning to ease up a bit except, perhaps, on the airfields. There didn't really seem very much left to bomb. Whole cities, like Senglea and Cospicua and Vittoriosa, were just heaps of blasted rubble and quite deserted. But a certain amount of Valetta had survived and the inhabitants lived in deep tunnels and shelters in the rock. This is no sort of life for children because there was no electric light, very little paraffin and most of the shelters were in darkness. But when the all-clear sounded after a raid the children came pouring out of the shelters by hundreds, shouting and dancing as if led by the Pied Piper.

Between raids children are more in evidence in some places than grown-ups. They play mysterious games among the ruins of what were once churches or palaces or homes. They have long ago lost what toys they may have possessed, but in the process they seemed also to have lost a child's natural dread of noise and violence. The whole time I was there I never saw or heard a child cry.

The approach of hostile aircraft is signalled from a conspicuous place by a red flag where it can be seen all over the harbour. It is the warning for those who do not take cover when the sirens sound, and it means that attack is imminent. In the labyrinth of narrow streets and the shells of buildings it is impossible for everybody to see that red flag, and accordingly an organisation came into existence to relay the warning everywhere. It is in the hands of boys, who have erected little wooden masts at points of vantage from where they can be seen by the maximum number of people in that neighbourhood. It is an entirely voluntary service and these children stick to their posts throughout an attack, crouched among the debris, hoping to be the first to hoist the signal, "Raiders Passed," that will release all the other children back into the air and the sunlight.

Sometimes in the evening I used to go to one of the shelters in Valetta. It was a tunnel that went down to a series of wide steps a long way under the city. There were tiers of bunks along the walls and on the steps and on the bunks were hundreds of people clustered in little family groups. Two or three paraffin lamps that hung at intervals from the roof was the only illumination. Some distance down the tunnel there was an altar, and round it on the bare stones sat 40 or 50 quite small children. An older girl of about twelve slipped out of the shadows and began to recite the Rosary. At each period the children intoned the responses. The adults sat in the shadows listening, with the lamplight just touching a face or a pair of folded hands, like a canvas by Rembrandt.

Well, it went on and on, a rhythm of treble voices like the sway of a pendulum. Or perhaps it was like a flowing river that carried us all into another dimension, from where the occasional thud of a bomb and the distant roar of the barrage sounded unreal and meaningless. In the shadowed faces round me there was only peace.

I remember an old man suddenly getting up and standing among the children, holding his cap in his hands, contemplating the Mysteries. A tiny creature of about three, who had apparently suddenly decided she had had enough, set off alone up a ladder and climbed into bed. The little priestess rang a bell, and the children's voices stopped. Then they sang a hymn and everybody settled down for the night.

I sat one day on a parapet that overlooks the main street. Here I was joined by a lady of about nine, three tiny boys and a baby girl. We sat in a row in the sunshine and talked. They had an uncle who had been serving on board a battleship in the Eastern Mediterranean; he had just been killed. I said I was very sorry; but the little girl said that he had been killed fighting against the Italians and so they were proud.

While we talked the red flag suddenly appeared at a little mast quite near. The smallest boy pointed at it. He was about four. I lifted them down and they trotted off, hand in hand, to the nearest shelter, quite unconcerned. As we parted they all said *Sahha*, which is Maltese and means "Strength be with you."

S. T. Coleridge

LETTERS FROM MALTA

To WILLIAM SOTHEBY, 47, U. Seymour Street, London.

Malta, July 5, 1804.

My dear Sir—I hope, that Mr. Laing who returns to England with young Ball, will find you out. Mr. L. is a truly amiable, well-informed young clergyman who has in fact been Sir Alexander's Secretary as well as Tutor of his son. From him you will hear everything of Malta—and as soon as I get to Sicily I shall write to you.

Your letters to Sir A.B.* and General Valette produced every effect that letters could possibly do—my extreme low spirits and langour have prevented me from hitherto cultivating the General's acquaintance as much as I ought and wished to have done—for he was very attentive and polite, and I have no doubt would do anything to serve a man so introduced by you. I have hitherto lived with Dr. Stodhart, but tomorrow shall take up my residence at the Palace, in a suite of delightfully cool and commanding rooms which Sir Alexander was so kind as not merely to offer me but to make me feel that he wished me to accept the offer. I have been writing for him to the last moment—an excuse for this brief scrawl than which there might be a hundred worse I am sure, in your opinion.

I had from Gibraltar to Malta a most distressful passage of almost continual illness, and at one time I expected to die—and God be praised that time was far enough from the most unhappy, I have lately passed. Since my arrival I have never had those sharp illnesses, I used to have in England, and since I have revolutionised my system, that is to say, forced myself to eat my meals and to take a few glasses of port wine after dinner, bathed regularly at or before sunrise, read very little, brooded less, and tried not to be idle a moment, but always either to be actually writing, or taking exercise, or in company, I have been perceptibly better—my breathing less smothered, and I am less apt to sink at once into nervous dosings, with twitches, etc. I cannot expect that greatly as something or other within me, stomach, or liver, or mesentery is deranged, I can establish my health otherwise than very slowly, but it is greatly in my favor that this very hot weather (the Thermometer 86 in the shade) agrees with me. I am not at all oppressed or *discomfortized* by it—and, I believe, am the only English man in the Island that can say this. When I write from Sicily, I hope I shall be able to send a yet more cheerful account, and to tell you not only how I am, but likewise what I have done.

Meantime remember me with respectful affection to Mrs. Sotheby and Miss Sotheby, and believe me, my dear Sir,

* Sir Alexander Ball, Governor of Malta at the time.

whether sick or well, in Malta or in England I remember your kindnesses with pleasure as well as gratitude for I feel that I am not unworthy of them—with very affectionate esteem.

Your obliged and attached Friend

S. T. COLERIDGE.

* Sir A. Ball is a very extraordinary man—indeed a great man. And he is really the abstract idea of a wise and good Governor. The Ministers were in luck. Merciful Heaven! what wretches they send out as Consuls to the States of Barbary—the seat and bustle-place of French intrigue—and thither they send to check the picked Agents of the French Government—a Mr. Langford—whose Brawls with his wife, and notorious Follies drive every servant out of his house—a man the laughing-stock of all Malta! “O he is only a Barbary Consul!” These “onlies” threaten our country terribly, my dear Sir! and if you have any influence with any person about Government, you would act the part of a true Patriot in pressing on them the necessity of sending out men of Talents and character to all the coasts of (the) Mediterranean—Fools *that are* to be provided for had better be pensioned at once; the nation would save millions by the scheme.

P.S.—Sir A. has repeatedly told (me) that if any place should be vacant, he would give it me, and has offered me the Salary of the under Secretary during his absence, which may be about two months including his Quarantine, and indeed has given me the power to draw for the 2 months salary—that is to say 50 £. But this I do not intend doing.

*

To ROBERT SOUTHEY, Greta Hall, Keswick, Cumberland.

Malta, August 4, 1804.

My dear Southey—General Oakes sets off, almost without notice, for England, part of the way overland. I have only time to say that I am and have been most anxious to hear from you and concerning you and *yours*: that I have received *no letters*, some evil chance having intercepted them or sent them to the Fleet off Toulon—I received the box with the German pocket books, and O bitter disappointment not even a scrawl or a single bit of paper in it—and I kept it unopened almost a whole day, my heart beat so violently with expectation that I feared to see the Letters, of which I doubted not to find many, for I supposed the box to have been put up by Mottley.

I continue free from Disease, but I have reason to know that it is because the diseasing causes are absent, and not that I have as yet gained any strength to bear up against them. The violent Heat does not disagree with me—I know what (it) is by the Thermometer, but I do not feel it, and

no doubt I have better things to hope for from the late autumn and winter.

I go to Sicily next week—have been for the last six weeks domesticated with Sir A. Ball, who is exceedingly kind to (me). I live when in the country, which I am 9 days out of 10, at the Palace of St. Antonio 4 miles from La Valetta, when in La Valetta at the Palace there—and if living in lofty and splendid rooms be a pleasure, I have it—I hope to have an opportunity of writing to Sara in the course of the next week, but I must not let this slip by O my sweet children! and I know nothing of them. May God Almighty bless you—and

S. T. COLERIDGE.

Mrs. Coleridge will open this, if Mr. S. be absent.

*

To MRS. S. T. COLERIDGE.

December 12, 1804.

Dear Sara—I will not occupy much of the short letter I have time to write, in expressing what anguish even to bodily disease I have suffered by the almost total failure of my Letters from England, the *certain* loss of *one* large parcel sent by me homeward from Sicily, which was taken by an Algerian and my papers not improbably at Paris by this time and no certainty of the other. A convoy will leave this place in less than a fortnight when I shall write at full. This letter I send to the fleet in *hope* that it may come to hand by a Russian Officer of my acquaintance.

I returned or rather was abruptly recalled from Syracuse, Nov. 7, just as the carriage was at the door in which I was going to Messina, and thence to visit the island. My health is *very greatly* improved in this heavenly climate—the trees are loaded with oranges now in the state for plucking, and La Valetta echoes with cries of green peas—peas cried in Arabic in December. The last week was very cold and rainy and I suffered from it—but now it is exactly like our pleasantest days in Autumn. Were I happy, I should grow stout, but tho' I am tranquil, I do not know what it is to have one *happy* moment, or *one* genial feeling. Not one, so help me God! No visitation of mind in fancy, but only the same dull gnawing pain at the heart—sometimes, indeed, tho' seldom relieved by a flow of tears when I can cry aloud to myself—My children, my children.

I am still an inmate of the Palace, tho' I sleep and study in a sort of garret in the Treasury commanding a most magnificent view of open sea, and lakelike harbour as grand and impressive as a view can be without trees, rivers or green fields. I only however stay here till a suite of rooms can be fitted up for me in the Palace—My *old* ones were given in my absence to Commissioner Otway. What I am to receive I scarcely know. I have had £50 but my various expences in

Sicily, bedding, 2 pair of sheets, mosquito curtain etc., and for clothes (as I dine at the Palace as confidential Secretary of the Government every day)—as well as for the little comforts I must have in my own room and the expence of my servant, obliged to draw upon Stuart for £50, which however I hope to replace by the next convoy—at all events I shall send you £50 to pay my Life-Assurance and your mother. Out of this £100, however, which I have spent, you must understand that I have payed Dr. Stoddart an old debt of £25, which reduced it to £75. I guess that in a few days I shall have to receive a £100 as four months salary.

I am constantly and even laboriously employed and the confidence placed in me by Sir A. Ball is unlimited. I am, if I do not cry off myself—to go into Greece at the beginning of January on a corn-commission for the island, and from thence thro' Albania along the Northern-shore of the Archipelago to Constantinople, thence up the Black Sea to the mouth of the Dnieper and into the Crimea, and possibly into the heart of Russia. Captn. Leake is to be with me if he is not called off by other duties; but it will be a most anxious business, as I shall have the trust and management of 70, or 80 thousand £, while I shall not have for my toil and perils more than 3 or 4 hundred £, exclusive of all my expences in travelling etc.—on the whole, if I could get off with honour, I would and shall make the attempt. I undertook it in a fit of despair when Life was a burthen to me. If I could make up my mind to stay here or to follow Sir A.B. in case that circumstances and change in the political world should lead him to Sardinia no doubt I might have about £500 a year, and live mainly at the Palace—but God! O God! if that Sara which we both know too well, were not unalterably my lot, how gladly would I prefer the mere necessities of life in England and these obtain by dint of effort—But since my health has been restored to me, I have felt more than ever how unalterable it is! whatever and wherever I am, be assured that my first anxiety and prominent Duty will be to contribute everything in my power to make you as happy as I can compatibly with the existence of that health and (joyless indeed both) on which the very power of doing anything for you must depend.

I hope however to see more clearly the way before me in less than a fortnight. How I long for Letters from Southey and from Grasmere. O my children! I cannot write their names. Even to speak of them there is an effort of courage. Remember me, of course, to Mr. Jackson, to Mrs. Wilson etc.—May God Almighty preserve your health and life for your happiness and for the sake of our dear children. I remain faithful to you and to my own honour in all things, and am most anxiously and affectionately your friend and more than friend.

S. T. COLERIDGE.

George Percy Badger

NOTE ON MALTESE FOLK POETRY

“ The Maltese have the peculiar talent for poetry which is natural to all those nations who speak the Arabic language. The taste for this kind of composition has very much degenerated in the cities, but in the country it is met with in its original purity of style and expression. I have often stood and listened to individuals seated upon two opposite trees, or engaged in some kind of labour, singing answers to each other in rhyme, without any previous meditation. This the natives call *taqbeel*.

The subjects vary according to circumstances, sometimes partaking of the nature of epic poetry, and sometimes of satire upon the faults of character of each. The tunes set to these are in general somewhat wild, as in the music of the Maltese in general, but a wildness which is not without its romantic beauty and harmony. In this respect, few will fail to admire the singing of the natives as they join in small companies, each taking a part, which they maintain throughout the whole performance.

I here subjoin two songs for the amusement of the reader, with a rough English translation, in order that he may judge somewhat of such amorous effusions:—

*Beloved, I'm about to leave you.
I sigh that I take you not with me.
May God give you now resignation,
And preserved you secure in my love—*

*And preserve you secure in my love,
That you ever remember me—
Remember, I always have heard you;
Since the time I was but an infant—*

*Since the time I was but an infant,
My heart has always been drawn after you,
And I can work in no other light,
But the light of your beautiful eyes.*

*In the light of your beautiful eyes,
I have always directed my steps;
Beloved I'm going to leave you.
I sigh that I take you not with me.*

*How sore does the pain come upon me,
When I think I must soon depart;
But if Heaven be propitious, my dear,
We shall yet enjoy one another.*

The following verses, which were furnished me by a Maltese lady, I insert chiefly for the sake of giving the reader an idea of the matter in which matrimonial alliances are entered into by a portion of the town-people. The four persons introduced in the song are the young man, the *hottaba*, the mother of the young woman, and the young woman herself.

In order to render the piece intelligible, it will be necessary to premise that it is not customary for a young man unacquainted with the lady with whom he has fallen in love to declare his passion in person, neither would he be allowed to enter into her parent's house; but he employs a third, generally an old woman, who takes upon herself the office of endeavouring to bring about the match. This character is called a *hottaba*, and is always possessed with an exquisite gift for flattery, a specimen of which will be readily noticed in the song. I give a literal translation, in order better to preserve the native idiom and phraseology.

INTRODUCER: *Would you know what a maiden does
 From morning until evening?
 She adorns her head with curls,
 And seats herself in the balcony.
 She seats herself in the balcony,
 And sets about making love;
 When she sees her mother coming
 She begins hemming her handkerchief.
 The young man walks up and down,
 To see if the old woman is there,
 He traverses (the street) from one end to
 the other,
 As he does not wish to remain with the
 smell*.*

*He meets with an old grandmother,
 And says: "Woman will you help me,
 I care nothing about money,
 So as that you are able to serve me?"*

(The bargain is struck, and the frokeres goes to the house of the young woman, and meets with the mother.)

HOTTABA: *Madam, I think I know you,
 When quite little you lived near me,
 How oft I bore you, how old I lov'd you,
 How oft I fondled you in my arms.
 Madam, I think I know you,
 I think you have several maidens,
 For as I was passing through the street
 I saw one standing at the door.*

*A Maltese idiom for expressing failure in an undertaking.

- Madam, tell me what ails you,
For you appear very melancholy?*
- MOTHER: *Do you know what they say of my daughter?
That she is already in love.*
- HOTTABA: *Be easy, Madam, be easy,
People's tongues say many things;
Your daughter is a good girl,
Whoever takes her will gain a fortune.*
- MOTHER: *Come down, my daughter, come down,
Here's a grandmother desire to see you,
She is a very old woman,
And with her words she will console you.*
- (The daughter descends, and the old woman addresses her):
- HOTTABA: *A message I have brought you,
And wish one hastily in return,
For the beloved of your heart has sent me,
Who with pain is now quite ill.*
- DAUGHTER: *A message you have brought me,
A hasty answer I will not give.
For my mother knows this young man,
And will not have him for my husband.*

Besides the above, the Maltese have also a large number of proverbs, or adages in rhyme, many of which preserve their strict Arabic original. These are still often used in conversation, but without any new additions, as the taste for such compositions has greatly degenerated since the introduction of the Italian language.

(Description of Malta and Gozo, Malta 1858.

LORD BYRON TO HIS MOTHER

Malta, September 15, 1809.

Dear Mother—Though I have a very short time to spare, being to sail immediately for Greece, I cannot avoid taking an opportunity of telling you that I am well. I have been in Malta a short time, and have found the inhabitants hospitable and pleasant.

This letter is committed to the charge of a very extraordinary woman, whom you have doubtless heard of, Mrs. Spencer Smith*, of whose escape the Marquis de Salva published a narrative a few years ago. She has since been shipwrecked, and her life has been from its commencement so fertile in remarkable incidents, that in a romance they would appear improbable. She was born at Constantinople, where

her father, Baron Herbert, was Austrian Ambassador; married unhappily, yet has never impeached in point of character; excited the vengeance of Buonaparte by a part in some conspiracy; several times risked her life; and is not yet twenty-five. She is here on her way to England, to join her husband, being obliged to leave Trieste, where she was paying a visit to her mother, by the approach of the French, and embarks soon in a ship of war. Since my arrival here, I have had scarcely any other companion. I have found her very pretty, very accomplished, and extremely eccentric. Buonaparte is even now so incensed against her, that her life would be in some danger if she were taken prisoner a second time.

You have seen Murray and Robert by this time, and received my letter. Little has happened since that date. I have touched at Cagliari in Sardinia, and at Girenti in Sicily, and embark to-morrow for Patras, from whence I proceed to Vanina, where Ali Pacha holds his court. So I shall soon be among the Musulmans. Adieu.

Believe, with sincerity, yours ever,

BYRON

* Byron's "new Calypso." Mrs. Spencer Smith (born about 1785) was the daughter of Baron Herbert, Austrian Ambassador at Constantinople, wife of Spencer Smith, the British Minister at Stuttgart, and sister-in-law of Sir Sidney Smith, the hero of Acre. To her are addressed the "Lines to Florence", the "Stanzas composed during a Thunderstorm" and stanzas XXX-XXXII of the second canto of *Childe Harold*.

The Duchesse d'Abrantes (Memoires, vol. XV. pp. 4, 5) thus describes her: "Une jeune femme, dont la delicate et elegant tournure, la peau blanche et diaphane, les cheveux blonds, les mouvements onduleux, toute une tournure impossible à decrire autrement qu'en disant qu'elle était de toutes les créatures la plus gracieuse, lui donnaient l'aspect d'une de ces apparitions amonées par un rêve heureux . . . il y avait de la Sylphide en elle. Sa vue excessivement basse n'était qu'un charme de plus."

Moore (*Life*, p. 95) thinks that Byron was less in love with Mrs. Smith than with his recollection of her. According to Galt (*Life of Byron*) "he affected a passion for her, but it was only Platonic. She, however, beguiled him of his yellow diamond ring."

"*Letters and Journals, Vol. I. 1898,*" Edited by Rowland E. Prothero.

Rev. Charles Dessoulavy

CATS, GOATS, HORSES

Having been asked to put on paper some impressions made on me during my all-too-short stay in Malta, I shall refrain from any attempt to describe the impression produced by the ancient hospitality of those who dwell in it. Instead I shall confine myself to a few brief comments on some of the four-footed living beings that came under my observation.

As a cat-lover of long standing, I could not fail to notice the Maltese pussies. Even had I wilfully shut my eyes to them in the daytime my attention would have been called to them in the nights, when they came in batches to sing me wordless serenades from the neighbouring battlements.

The cats of Malta (like the Maltese dogs, of which I did not see one) hold an honoured place in the records of olden visitors to Malta. Skippon, who went to Malta in 1664, writes: "The cats of the Island are much esteemed. They are of a curious dark griseous colour." On the whole they are good-looking compared with those of other parts of Europe and the greys alluded to by Skippon are still fairly numerous. But the first thing that strikes the Northern visitor is their abnormal shyness. No doubt my utterance of the vocative *meixu* was faulty, but the effect of my well-meant efforts was quite too disheartening, every cat so addressed seemed to be scared out of its wits and promptly taking to its heels, for all the world as if I had been a scalp-hunter on the look-out for feline trophies.

And another point that also strikes the English visitor is their extreme leanness compared with the sleek creatures of the homeland. The cat's meat man dealing exclusively in provisions for cats, is, I suppose, an institution peculiar to England, and, possibly, Maltese cats are not so well fed as they might be, or, possibly, the Maltese are less concerned in the well-being of pets than we are. The last hypothesis is perhaps borne out by the comparative rarity of sea-gulls which I noticed as in remarkable contrast with their abundance in London, or, in the Swiss towns, where they are the pets of everybody. On the other hand, the fine canaries I saw exposed for sale, which certainly showed no signs of underfeeding, militate against the last supposition, so that both the coyness and the slimness of the Malta cats remain to me a riddle.

The goats, too, took my fancy. In the older parts of Clermont-Ferrand, the former capital city of Auvergne, you see, or did see quite recently, very much the same scenes of goats being milked in the streets, save that they have learnt the trick, when a companion is being milked, of going to the neighbouring doors and tapping at them with their hooves until the kind-hearted tenants come out with a crust for them. The Maltese goats are such charmingly kind-featured, friendly-looking souls that I could hardly bring myself to believe that they are indeed the culprits who send so many people to hospital with fever, but the poor creatures struck me as looking dreadfully weary, and, no wonder, if, as I am given to understand, they have to tramp long miles unmilked.

It is odd to think that forty years ago well-meaning people were writing to the English newspapers urging that the practice of milking cows on the doorstep should be introduced into London, to insure greater cleanliness of the milk. Since then the world has moved and other, better means of

preventing dirt and infection have been found. The new regulations foreseen in Malta, of prohibiting all milking in the streets of the towns will enable the authorities to see that the milk is properly sterilized in bulk before being delivered to the consumers in the towns. Incidentally, the alteration will be to the advantage of the goat-keepers, for people who now fight very shy of goat's milk will return to the use of this excellent food, whilst both the quantity and the quality of the milk should be improved when its givers have no longer to be driven long distances with full udders.

Then the horses. One of the things that I knew quite well by pictures and descriptions, but which I wanted to see with my own eyes, was the famous former *Dar-il-morda*, of which olden travellers had so much to say. It is now the Police Headquarters in Valetta. The great hall turned out to be just what I expected, on a vastly bigger scale, just like the mediæval hospital at Wells in Somerset. But the unexpected came when the Sergeant-Major (a Leicester man) who took us round, led the way downstairs to the almost equally famous crypt. There I expected to find some sort of lumber-room, instead of which one's gaze was met by a long row of horsy muzzles, Arab faces chock full of mischief. There was no need for the order "Eyes right!" The horses roam at will in their roomy boxes and fine creatures they are, very unlike our English prosaic horses but with many points in common with the denizens of our racing stables.

I should have liked to add a word in praise of other friends I met, to wit the hogs at the Experimental Farm, but they, unfortunately, were English, and only their progeny (may it be numerous and sound!) will have claims to the Maltese birthright.

CONSTITUTION PHYSIQUE ET MORALE DES MALTAIS*

Quoique toujours soumis, toujours la proie des nations qui, tour à tour, dominèrent dans la Méditerranée, les Maltais ont conservé un type caractéristique qui prouve, sinon l'antipathie, du moins le peu de fusion qui a existé entre eux et les races dominantes.

Aucun peuple ne pousse plus loin que le peuple maltais l'attachement à la patrie; content de peu, audessus des besoins factices, de la société, il sait vivre heureux et pauvre dans son isle, qu'il appelle avec enthousiasme *la fleur de l'univers, fiore del mondo*; et, lorsqu'il s'en éloigne, il ne renonce jamais à l'espoir d'y venir terminer ses jours.

Le Maltais a de la religion au fond de l'âme; cette religion, dont il remplit les devoirs sans ostentation, il l'aime d'autant

**Histoire de Malte*, par M. Miège, ancien consul de France à Malte, 3 volumes, Paris, 1840.

plus qu'elle prend sa source, non seulement dans une fois sincère, mais encore dans cette habitude, contractée dès l'enfance, de chercher au sein des cérémonies religieuses un délaissement, que les autres peuples trouvent dans les spectacles et les réjouissances publiques. Cette piété, poussée jusqu'au fanatisme, lui fait supporter, sans se plaindre, la misère et les mauvais traitements, pourvu que l'on ne touche ni à ses églises ni au ministres du culte; mais si l'on y porte atteinte, il est capable de tous les excès.

Très jaloux de sa réputation, le Maltais regarde sa comparaison devant une court criminelle, n'importe à quel titre, d'accusé, d'accusateur, ou même de témoin, comme une atteinte portée à sa renommée, à ses bonnes moeurs. Aussi est-il de son naturel extrêmement pacifique et tranquille. Sa soumission aux lois, au gouvernement, est telle, que la seule présence d'un agent de police, sans armes, suffit pour mettre fin à des rixes qui, sans son intervention, auraient été ensanglantées.

Tant de qualités n'excluent pas, chez le Maltais, certains défauts de caractère, et, chose particulière, les mêmes défauts que l'on reproche aux Africains. Tout dans ses habitudes, dans son tempérament, trahit l'influence du ciel brûlant sous lequel il est né. Ardent dans ses désirs, sensible aux outrages, il est, comme les peuples orientaux, soupçonneux et jaloux.

Toutefois, après avoir mis dans la balance les qualités et les défauts des Maltais, tout juge impartial reconnaîtra que ce peuple porte dans son sein tous les éléments capables de l'élever à la hauteur des nations des plus civilisées, et que, pour cela, il s'agirait uniquement de développer les heureuses dispositions que la nature lui a données.

S. Fowler-Wright

THE SIEGE OF MALTA

THE Grand Master, having no thought of surrender on any terms, whether good or bad, but being resolved to abate any confidence that his foes might feel, was no less alert than the Turkish leader to use the opportunities that the truce allowed.

Being Sunday, there would have been High Mass in San Lorenzo Church had it been a time of less urgent stress, with ceremony of burial, each in his own *langue*, of the knights who had died in the last week, but he ordered now that it should be celebrated in the breach itself, and in full sight of the Turks, for which there was double cause.

For he purposed to show the Turks all the strength he had, and as much more as they could be made to guess, to which end, making full use of a risk that the truce allowed, he drew every man he could, both from castle and town, as well as every part of the wall, that they might make such assembly, in numbers and in array, as Mustapha could have no pleasure to see.

It was to be Requiem also, and consecration of ground for knights who would never lie in the bounds of the convent church, having been blown apart when the mine was sprung and covered by its collapse; or who had fallen after among the shattered fragments on which they fought, being trampled down and covered by other deaths, whether of friend or foe, and dreadfully buried at last by the stones which those who remained had rolled or tumbled into the breach.

The Grand Master would not have hastened the Mass though the earth rose or the heavens fell; but when he spoke himself (as he determined to do, seeing so many assembled there whom he would rouse to his own zeal) he was short of words, considering how much was to be done by few hands during the quick hours of the truce.

Gratias ageus Deo, accepit fiduciam, were the high words of the text he chose, being the record of Paul, after he had left that same isle, fifteen hundred years before that, when he approached Rome in a captive's gyves, and found that he was not forgotten of friends who came out to meet him, and were await at the Three Taverns, on the Appian Way.

It was well said that they should have courage equal to his, seeing that they had endured for the same time, the Apostle having been shipwrecked in Malta for three months before *Castor and Pollux* sailed (it was likely) from St. Angelo's quay to bear him away, and they now hearing that the Viceroy was stirring to bring them aid; but he was brief about that. He would not have them fight as men clinging to life, and counting only how themselves might come out at the last; for he knew that there will ever be those who crouch low under the wall, having no better impulse than that, leaving it to others to do the great deeds by which all are to go free, through which may all come to a poor end at the last.

He rather called their thoughts to the vows by which they had become part of the great Order which joined them now, asserting that which he would have them to be in such confident words that it became easy to their belief. He adjured them as men under the inspiration of God to bring down the infidel pride which blasphemed His power before the eyes of the watchful saints.

"We have no lust," he made boast, "for a slothful ease: we have put from us carnal desire: we listen not for the plaudits of men: but before our eyes is the symbol of Christian faith, and in our ears the high trumpet of God calls us to the unfaltering ranks of those who may be martyred but do not fail."

They heard him, and looked out over the half-filled fosse to where Mustapha watched the scene with curious and contemptuous eyes. He rode a milk-white mare that the deserts bred: He was splendid in inlaid armour and crimson silks, and surrounded by those of barbaric glitter that matched his own.

Behind him were the trenches which had crept up close to ruined ramparts too weak to control their foes, batteries which had nearly silenced the Christian guns, and regiments forming to make instant assault when the hours of truce should be done; but they looked up to the lifted Cross with the assurance that they were partnered by an Invincible Power, and outward with the fortitude of men who are sacramentally destined to die.

*

It was Sunday, 9th September, when St. Angelo waked to the knowledge that the shadow of death was lifted from round its walls.

The Grand Master gave order that all who had strength to stand should assemble to meet those who had so gallantly come, and at so late and vital an hour, and who had been potent for its relief; and that they should join thereafter to give the thanks that were due to God in the Convent Church, to which the most part of the knights who had come to Malta four months before did not need to arise to reach, being already laid in its vaults.

Della Corna rode through a trodden and blackened land, past half-filled fosse and half-fallen wall, and up the street of a ruined town.

He was met by six hundred of sundry sorts, who were still able to stand. They were hollow-eyed from their sleepless toils: they were sloven of garb and beard: the most of them were maimed or crippled with bandaged wounds.

He looked round when he had greeted the Grand Master, and those who were nearest to him. He asked: "Will you say you have held the town with this remnant of men?"

"They are all here but those that the lazars hold."

Della Corna was silent, being amazed. Then he said: "It is a most marvellous thing, for the heathen dogs must have been held out by their own fears at the last, more than by any strength that you had."

"They were held out," the Grand Master replied, "by our faith in the living God."

Sir Oliver added: " We may say that they were withheld by the valour of those who are now dead. There are eight thousand of Christian graves."

Marshal Couppier said: " They were withheld to the last hour. You had been too late in a day."

Della Corna replied: " I would claim less, having seen that which belies the settled science of war. But it is plain that you must leave here, for I can see that the town is ruin, the land waste. You have neither powder nor walls. And it is known that your treasure was spent to supply your stores when the Turks came. You would be sheep to slay if they should return their fleet with the spring, as they are most likely to do. And, besides that, you are all invalid men. You must get out the ships you have and make sail for a better land, where you can have the comfort and honour that Europe owes to those who have saved her shame."

He said no more than Mustapha would do in another voice, when he would make a boast that Soliman would prefer to accept, rather than disgrace his own arms by degrading him: " I came away, having nothing more to destroy. I left Malta flat."

La Valette said: " We do not think to remain here. We have better plans."

" The Grand Master," Sir Oliver said, " has long held that the castle was not builded where it should have been at first; yet it had seemed a great matter to move the town. But now that it is so battered about, it can be built in a better place."

As he spoke, he looked over the harbour to where the ridge of Scerberras rose, and Della Corna saw the meaning behind his words.

St. Elmo should not have been a weak place apart when the Turks arrived, but the spearhead of the central strength of the Maltese knights. They should have built between the two harbours, so that they would have commanded both.

But Mount Scerberras, as its name implied, was high and narrow, and too steep for a city site. He said: " You can strengthen St. Elmo's walls, and enlarge its girth, till it be a castle that none could take. But I suppose you must have your town in another place. Scerberras is too steep for the homes of men, as it is simple to see."

The Grand Master said: " Then we must be active to lay it flat."

Della Corna asked: " Do you mean that you will remain here, though your walls are down, and with so wild a project as that?"

" Shall I leave the charge I am vowed to keep? And that when the Cross is high and the Pagans flee?"

Della Corna made no answer to that. He saw in a clear

light how it had been that Mustapha had remained on the outside of those fallen walls.

They went on to the church. . . .

It is another tale of how the Grand Master planned a new city of impregnable strength, which men would after call by his name, and how he commenced to flatten Sceberras ridge, as he had said he would do.

The Turks had the design that Della Corna had guessed, that they would come back with the coming spring; but La Valette saw the one thing that would break their plans, and struck hard and first, as it was his nature to do.

He found gold in a great sum for a secret plot, and before the Turks were assembled and fitted forth, there came a night when the great arsenal at Byzantium, which was the first at that time that the world held, rose in dreadful thunder and flame, with utter loss of the thousand cannon and great stores it held, of powder, and of all manner of munitions of war; and the Turks must resign a plan for which they had little left but their naked hands.

So the great street of Valetta was cut from the stubborn rock, and its ramparts rose, and Sir Oliver found that he had still much to control, for there were stores to be brought from far, and thousands of workmen who must be paid, and funds which must be gathered from Europe's bounds, that being hardest of all, for there were many pledges which were not kept; and there would come a day when workmen would call for their wages for which no treasure remained, and they must be paid with tokens of the Grand Master's design—for he would go on his stubborn way, though the gold were none—with *Non aes sed fides* stamped thereon, which would be redeemed on a later day.

And so La Valette would be laid with honour at last in the new church of the city which had been built in his own dream before it rose into solid stone, as must be first of all the makings of man, and as men must have been first of the thoughts of God while the earth still bubbled with heat. And Sir Oliver would write—as may still be seen on the inscription that scrolls his tomb. . . .

From *The Siege of Malta*, a novel founded on an unfinished roman-
Walter Scott, published by Frederick Muller, London. 1942.

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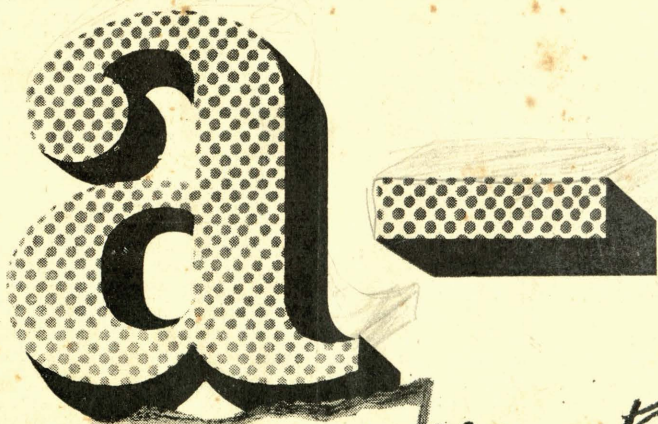
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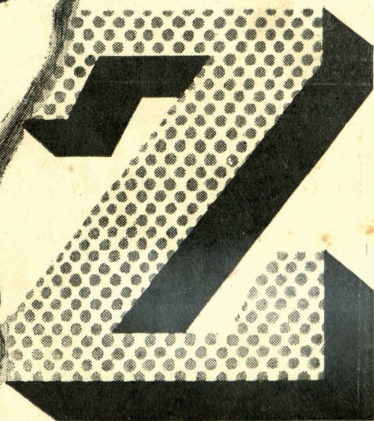
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