

MUSTA

Its Memories and Charms.

(WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS).



By Don. Edgardo Salomone, Malta, 1910.

Musta
Memories and Charms

by

Rev. Edgar W. Salomone.



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With the Humble Respects
of the Author
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Preface.

In publishing this Booklet on the **Memories and Charms of Musta**, I have no other intention than that of responding to a call, constantly made, for a special Guide or Handbook to a much-visited Parish, based as far as possible upon original sources. Pains have not been spared to ensure accuracy, and it is hoped that it may help to foster greater interest in the Past History of sister-Parishes in the Island.

Meanwhile I desire to acknowledge with grateful thanks the obligation I am under to the Brothers of Charity, Rochdale, England, for their great assistance and patient revision of proofs: and to Francis Catania, Esq., Notary of Rabat, Malta, for much valuable and valued information.

My thanks are likewise due to the V. Rev. Don Paolo Mallia, present Arch Parish-Priest of Musta, for very kind permission to reproduce photographs, original plans, and portraits: to Emmanuele Pio De Bono, Esq., Notary of Nasciar, Malta, for reproduction of plans and portraits: and to the humble amateur artist Raphael Caruana Dingli Esq. for his beautiful and expressive border-design, as well as for the difficult reproduction of Grongnet's faded design of the old Parish church of Musta.

R. E. W. S.

Musta, Dec. 1910.

Introduction.

*There is a land of every land the pride
Beloved by heaven, o'er all the world beside.*

MONTGOMERY.

The Island of Malta may well pride herself of a past that has merited for her repeated praise and admiration from great nations.

From the time when her sister colony Carthage was humbled to the dust, her sons, owing to the smallness of their mother island, had to accept the rule of some superior power. The Romans, the Byzantines, the Saracens, the Spaniards, the Knights of St. John, the French, and finally the British have in turn possessed this "Prize of Nations." * Yet the history of Malta, as a whole, is not that of a down-trodden nation. Indeed if we except the Saracens and the French, we may say the masters of the Island came to it as friends and deliverers.

The Islanders have also fought with valour on the side of their rulers. When Sicily and, along with it, Malta passed under the sway of Aragonian Emperors, the Maltese Count Arrigo, called by Muratori "the bravest and most experienced captain of the time," was made Admiral of the Sicilian Fleet by Frederic I. European history, too, has recorded in its pages glorious deeds of heroism and the noble fidelity of the sons of Malta, when fighting under the White Cross of their Knightly Chiefs.

The Maltese, ever "famous for their piety and religion," † have inherited an innate attachment to all that concerns their Apostolic Faith; and, consequently, are rightly jealous of their ancient privileges, which they safeguard with scrupulous fidelity. History speaks of Maltese total disregard for danger and its consequences when there is a question of defending their creed and observing its practice. The greatest of generals commanding a conquering army at the close of the XVIII. century found little Malta, though betrayed by her Commanders, ready as of old

* Song of the Exile of Malta.

† An Eastern Cruise in the 'Edeline,' Countess De La Warr.

to sacrifice her life-blood rather than to stand witness to a disgraceful and sacrilegious violation of her churches and her most sacred rights. In more modern times, too, her protests have, with no little injustice, been interfered with in a spirit of ignorance, superstition and intolerance, by some who would gauge a people's wisdom, progress, and freedom by the weak indifferentism of the day.

Another noble heritage of these Islanders is an ardent, enthusiastic love for that splendour which should fitly represent, accompany, and revive their holy traditional practices. Thus they have, at all times and all over their island-home, raised up countless sanctuaries and many grand and spacious churches; while to the present day they most liberally contribute towards their embellishment, and cheerfully subscribe to the erection of new ones. These churches with their costly ornamentation furnish ample matter for the historian and afford much interest to a vast number of visitors, who are ever frequenting the shores of this "most Catholic member of the British Empire." *

Among these noble monuments of Maltese piety and earnestness in modern times, there is one—the great parochial church of Musta, which, on account of its gigantic proportions and similarity of shape, has not unfrequently been favourably compared with the great Pantheon of Agrippa in Rome.

In the hope of appealing to true lovers of Maltese church-history, and in order to encourage further interest among the numerous visitors to this church and its parish, I will attempt in the following pages to give a short chronicle of the faith of a people who ultimately gave to the beloved Mother-Isle one of the largest and which promises to be one of the most attractive churches in Christendom: to this I will also append a few notes on other places of historic and æsthetic interest.

* The 'Fior del Mondo' by J. Kendal S. J.

First Part.

1. The Village of *Musta* 2. Probable Origin of her Faith.
 3. Traces of Long-Standing Piety in Surviving Landmarks.

1. At a distance of three miles to the north of the old capital of Malta, and about four miles to the east of the historic Bay, once the scene of St. Paul's shipwreck,* one beholds stretching wide on the verge of a small and picturesque valley, a cluster of limestone, flat-roofed houses, superbly dominated by a large and noble round church, wherein about 9,000 Catholics, mainly farmers, stonecutters, masons, wheelwrights, carpenters and smiths, love to perform the sacred duties of the Religion of their ancestors.

2. This village is called *Musta*, from the Arabic synonym for *central*, forming as it does, one of the central hamlets of the Island. Originally it consisted of a few scattered farmhouses, the abodes of simple people who from time immemorial, cultivated the neighbouring lands of *WARDIA* (where the Apostle was the guest of Prince Publius), † and *BUR-MURRAD* (historically believed to have belonged to the Protos Insulae Publius). This fact and the proximity of the village to the ancient Phœnician Capital *Rabat*, known by the Romans as *Melita*, naturally leads one to suppose that not unlikely the original and IMMEDIATE FOUNDER OF THE FAITH OF THESE FARMERS was also THE FOUNDER OF THE MALTESE CHURCH.

3. If time has relentlessly deprived us of much that could illustrate the steady growth of the holy seed implanted in the simple and fertile souls of these agriculturists, during the early centuries of their christianity, yet we have no evidence of its decay or extinction. On the contrary, we have traces extant, which undoubtedly indicate their fidelity to their entrusted gift, principally noticeable in the deep-rooted piety and truly primitive devotion of their descendants towards God and His Holy Religion. Exterior tokens

* Act. Apost. C. XXVII.

† "Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta," Achille Ferris—Chiese nella "Wardia and Chiesa Beneficiale di San Paolo MILKI.



Photo by S. L. Cassar, Valletta.

Musta. Bird's Eye View from Cittavecchia.

of this are happily to be seen in the many beautiful traditions and holy customs of the present generation of Musta consequent upon a long-standing faith revealed by surviving landmarks of sacred spots which, ages gone by, were held in veneration by the forefathers of the present villagers.

Not the least important of these, still to be seen, are Two XVIIth CENTURY TOMBSTONES, lying in the middle of an old, but recently renovated cemetery, which also encloses within its grounds a little church dedicated to St. Margherite, Virgin and Martyr of Antioch and St. Roch, special Protector of the Plague-stricken. The stones bear the same border-design but differ slightly in the inner sculpture: one, having its lower half broken away, shows an arm holding a palm; while the other lying close to it and less disfigured bears a crest, the design showing a smaller arm likewise bearing a palm, as well as the incision of the figures 1594 and of four little crosses. The Church bears also beneath the cross, over its façade, the date 1771 (probably that of its re-erection). Before this date we find the description of another church standing in its place; from an original manuscript of the year 1680 * we read as follows: (Translation) "The CHURCH OF ST. MARGHARITA, *within reach of WIEDEL GHASEL, outside the village,*" (then follows a short account of its small endowment and its obligations) "*within its cemetery are buried many*" (who were) "*infected with the plague.*" † The last inference clearly justifies the insertion of St. Rock's image into the picture over the altar of the present church.

According to the same document the old church was in existence long before the date inscribed on the tombstones; in fact it tells further that on February 2, 1577, Paola, widow of Giacobbo Calleja, left a legacy in the acts of Notaro Angelo Bartolo "*cum onere accensionis lampadis vesperarum, et missæ in festo Dictæ Ecclesiæ.*"

* An Original manuscript relative to the spiritual state of the Diocese of Malta before 1680, preserved by Francesco Catania Esq. Notary of Rabat Malta, and is entitled:—

Breve Relazione dello stato spirituale di tutta la Diocesi di Malta con le chiese che sin al presente anno 1680 si trovano erette sotto la giurisdizione dell' Ordinario e delle qualità di ciascheduna d'esse, aggiungendovi d'alcune le fondazioni con loro entrate e pesi annessi in occasione della prima visita di Monsigro: Illmo: e Revmo: Vescovo F.D. Michaelè de Molina, nella seguente forma Riportata:—

† "Descrizione etc." Ferris—Altre CHIESE NELLA MUSTA E SUOI LIMITI, whence we learn that these were buried in 1592.

Another monument, proof of Musta's ancient faith, is to be found lower down this cemetery and chapel, in a little church built within a large cave or recess in Musta Ravine, in honour of **St. Paul, First Hermit**.

According to the same M.S. we learn of a "church of *St. Paul, First Hermit, called 'TA WIED EL GHASEL,'* situated in a solitary place and greatly venerated, (of which) the feast is annually celebrated, a great concourse of people taking part. It is administered by a procurator, who from its endowment has several Masses offered each year. It has been built to replace a former very ANCIENT CHURCH, at the expense of a devout PERSON OF MUSTA. After the Contagion of 1676, Don Ortenzio Bennini, choir-master of St. John's, inspired with a particular devotion, began to commemorate its feast yearly with additional music and sermon during High Mass. The same MS. states that in the chapel of the Madonna, within this church, there is a font which is always found full, (a fact attributed to singular favour); and that it never dries up or diminishes. Outside the church in the space fronting it, there is a (?) † for a font with a statue of St. Paul, the gift in 1646 of the devout Signor Filippo Cassar, beneath which may be seen his coat-of-arms, together with that of Signora Vincenza Xara his wife; that in this Church within the cave there is a chapel of the Madonna erected by Giovanni Paolo Mangione. quondam Joannis of CASAL MUSTA, vigore decreti of the Bishop, dated June 17, 1656, after endowing it by means of a legacy in the acts of Notaro Giovanni Paolo Fenech on Oct. 28th, 1655," etc.*

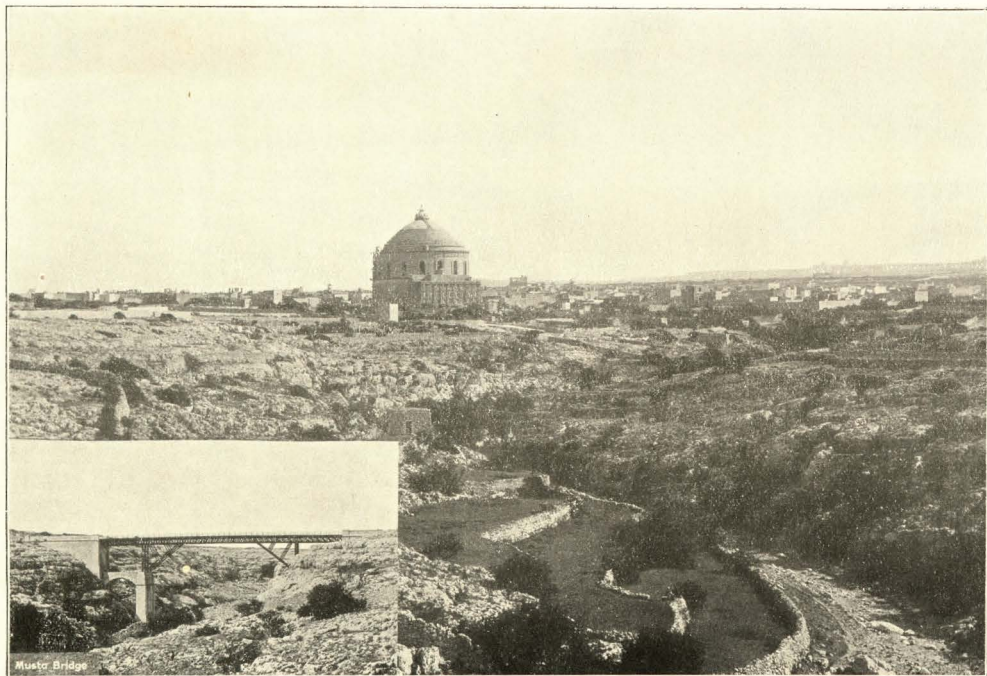
Remnants, unfortunately broken, of the above mentioned statue ‡ may still be found in the actual church and cave, a fact sufficient to link the interesting past of this relic to the piety of the present villagers.

But the most famous landmark is that of the little **Church of the Visitation**, close to the actual cemetery of the Parish and to the historic Palace called 'Torri tal Cumbu.'

* *La Chiesa di San Paolo Primo Eremita, appellata "ta Wied el Ghasel etc."*

† An illegible word, which might import 'pedestal.'

‡ Within the present church may still be seen the headless statues of St. Paul, St. Marcellus, and St. Anthony, abbot, wantonly broken by the soldiers from the fort above and consequently taken off the Pedestals by the care-takers and sheltered within the Chapel.



S. L. Cassar, Photo

Mdusta. Another View of Parish,

From R. E. Bridge across Wied el Ghasel, (in the foreground). The bridge may be seen on the left of the picture.

In the year 1615 during the Episcopal visit of Monsignor Cagliares * it was reported that Damiano Bonnici was the founder of this church, newly erected with the Sanction of the *Acta Civitatis Notabilis*."

The above-mentioned Manuscript has it that: "the church of the visitation of the Blessed Virgin, distant from the parish church 100 passi in circa, was under the obligation of a number of Masses etc." . . . A missa Cantata left by Domenico Mangione; That "it is hewn in the rock and of which during the visit of Mons. Duzina † mention is made as follows:—*Ecclesia sub vocabulo S. Mariae Visitationis sup. Casale Musta, sculpta in cripta quadam in forma rotunda exigua, et dicit (testes) alias fuisse consecratam septem Episcopis, qui naufragio casu insulam Militae pervenerunt.*"

Locally it is still believed that the church, commonly known as TA WEIDA, a name already owned by the founder of it, Damiano Bonnici, was erected somewhere close to, if not above, a buried sanctuary. There are still some of the elders of the Village who recollect the mention of a church dedicated to St. Elizabeth, cousin to the Mother of God, once extant close to the Cumbo Palace.

The Compiler has seen a manuscript[‡] of recent date, wherein the writer, a deceased Priest, mentions that near UIED IS-SIR there existed a church known as TAZ-ZIRI, and to it he attempts to connect the church mentioned in Mons. Duzina's Visit,^o as "distant from the Parochial about 100 yards."

Recent attempts to confirm the believed connection between the church TA WEIDA and the Sanctuary, by excavations have failed. But it is hoped that further and more thorough investigation will result in the discovery of so historic a spot.

Many other chapels stand witnesses to the fidelity of these people to the Church, that according to the old document have been built on the same site and in substitution for others, which time had decayed during the latter end of the xvith. and the beginning of the next century.

* Acta Visitationis Ep. Cagliares fol. 258.

† Notes (rough) for an intended History of Musta by Don Paolo Chetcuti.
^o Mons. Duzina visited the Diocese of Malta in 1575.



Thus we find the piety of this gradually increasing colony¹ further manifested in the successive reconstruction of:—

(1) The church of **St. Anthony, Abbot**, about the year 1657² through the generosity of Dr. Don Salvatore Fenech and Signor Florio Borg. After this date we read of this church being provided by the latter benefactor³ and Signor Antonio Xerri with pious legacies for regular Masses and Services.

(2) That of **The Immaculate Conception** (called 'TA DER IM BLAT'⁴—or as some would have it DAR EL BNIET⁵); according to Ferris;⁶ whose opinion is confirmed by the 1680 MS.,⁷ it was rebuilt about the year 1658 by the contribution of a certain Bartolomeo Busuttill; in the old MS. we find that, *It has not been long rebuilt at the expense of Bartolomeo Busuttill, quondam Mariani . . . distant from the Village about half a mile, over the place called "ANDAR IL BILATI."*⁸

(3) The church of **St. Leonard, Abbot**, was also according to the same authorities re-erected in 1659 from a legacy left by Bernarda Mangione in the acts of Notaro Giovanni Paolo Fenech on March 15th, 1858.

Besides these surviving stone connections with the Musta people of the remote past, we also know through the same document that this village could boast of several other since extinct churches, as well as a large '**Alma Domus**,⁹ dedicated from time immemorial by the

1 This colony consisted of 116 houses; Cf: Acta Visit: Mons Duzina fol 25.

2 "Descrizione Storica ecc." Ferris—Altre Chiese nella Musta e Suoi Limiti.

3 MS. 1680.

4 DEIR IM BLAT may mean ROCKY SACRED-ABODE, or

5 DEIR EL BNEIT—SACRED ABODE of the MAIDENS or VIRGINS which might remotely allude to the Buried Sanctuary.

6 Ferris—Descr: l. c.

7 La chiesa dell' Immacolata Concezione etc. Vid. Visit. Epi. Molinae, 30th Oct. 1670.


8 ANDAR or BAIDAR-EL-BLAT, means a rocky plain, Italian 'Aja,' called by the Latins 'area'—Over this place the Turks hoisted their imperial standard as a signal for their dispersed hordes to come and muster themselves on this plain before starting on their march of retreat towards SALINI where their ships awaited them on September 8th, 1565. Cf: ABELA-MALTA ILLUSTRATA—lib. I. not. VIII p. 84.

9 Epigraph—recording the historical changes of this old ALMA DOMUS of Musta it was inscribed over a marble slab once lying over the front door of the Old Parish church and now fixed on to one of the walls of the Corridor, which joins the two Sacristies of the Present Church.

D. O. M.

SUMMI ÆTERNI NVMINIS ALMA DOMUS.

ancients of the place to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, and described by Mons. Duzina as “ampla” and “Satis decens.” This old temple, we are given to understand by the writer of the “Relazione,” was administered by the Pastor of the neighbouring parish of Nasciar, * who was also expected to celebrate Mass in it on the day of its titular feast (Aug. 15th). In the acts of the Pastoral Visit of Mons. Cubelles in 1557 we find that provisions had been taken for the construction of a Baptismal Font in Marble, probably the same very old one still to be seen and used at present in the large new church.



Second Part.

1. Musta becomes a Parish. 2. Reconstruction of the Old Church. 3. Chronological List of Parish Priests.

1. In consequence of Monsignor Duzina's Visit—in the year 1575,—Holy Mother Church, ever solicitous for her children's welfare and in her universal providence, decided, through Her Visible Head, Pope Gregory III and his representative in Malta, Monsignor Fr. D. Martino Rojas, † to grant full parochial faculties and privileges to the old church of her faithful at Musta.

The newly-erected parish, however, remained under the jurisdiction of her old Curate, until September 13, 1608, when Monsignor Fra Tommaso Garcallo assigned to her a proper Parish Priest, in the person of the V. Rev. Don Giovanni Bezzina.

The new Pastor had already been working at Musta for over twenty years as vice curate to the old Parish priest of Nasciar: and it is beautiful to record that, out of deference to the latter's old age, Don Giovanni did not formally assert his superiority till after the death of this good Father.

* Nasciar i.e. corrupted from NASSARA or 'NSARA meaning Christians. The inhabitants of this place have always claimed the privilege of being the descendants of the first Christians in Malta—cf. Bosio Jacomo—Storia della Santa Religione e Militia di S. Giovanni P. 3. LIB. V. fogl. 93 and ABELA, Malta ILLUSTRATA, LIB. I. not. VIII. p. 84.

† See Epigraph at the end of Part I.

Thus it is that Ferris would have **Musta's independence** as a separate parish, to date from **July 16, 1610**, the day after the old Curate's funeral.

2. The parishoners, overjoyed at the final realization of their well-earned self-existence, soon made up their mind to reconstruct their decaying church.

We read of them preparing, together with their first Rector, for the noble enterprise, which, with the approval of Archbishop Fr. D. Baldassare Cagliares, they carried out under the direction of the Architect Tommaso Dingli and happily completed four years later, in 1614.

A sketch of this parish-church may be seen facing this page.

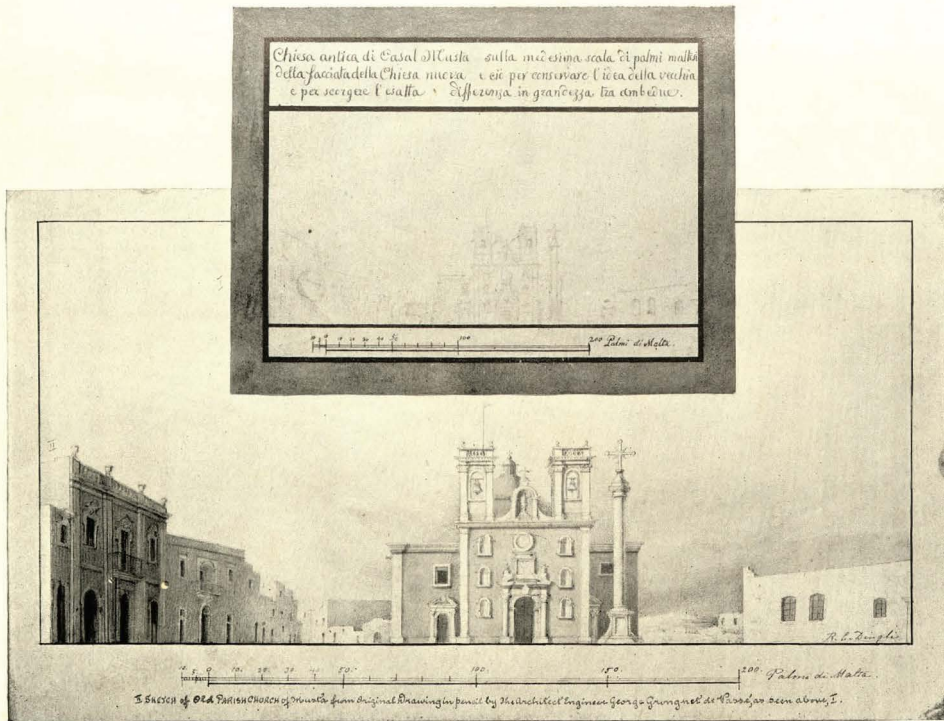
The interior of this temple, according to Ferris * consisted of a large nave, a transept, the sanctuary with a choir in its rear, and two sacristies.

From the MS, * referred to in Part I, we learn further that it possessed the same old font prescribed by Archbishop Cubelles: that *the picture belonging to the high altar, in substitution of an old one, was the work of the Maltese painter Pasquale Buhagiar, left by legacy of Don Giacomo Chetcuti in the acts of, etc., 1678.* Tradition assures us it is the same which now forms the central picture of the Modern Church.

Here too we are told that this church had the following altars or chapels:—

1. *An altar of the Rosary, administered by its Confraternity.*
2. *An altar of St. Paul, erected by Don Salvatore Muscat.*
3. *An altar of SS. Cosmas and Damian—by Don Salvatore Fenech J.V.D.*
4. *An altar of St. Joseph, raised by Giorgio Galea.*
5. *An altar of the Madonna delle Grazie, the gift of Giorgio Muscato and by him endowed, p. acta Not. Dominici Conti, 1614, 2 martii.*
6. *An altar of St. Roch, endowed by Damiano Busuttill, p. acta Not. Joannis Pauli Fenech, 30 apr. 1644.*

* Cf. MS. 1680.



I. Reproduction of original design in pencil of the Old Parish Church of Musta by the Architect Engineer, George Grongnet de Vasse, on the same scale of Maltese Palms of the Facade of the New Church; and this to preserve the idea of the old one, and at the same time to bring out the difference in greatness between both.

II. Sketch from same by Mr. Raphael Caruana Dingli, of Musta.

7. *An altar of SS. Dominic and Anthony of Padova * close to the baptismal font, erected in 1658 and blessed in 1659.†*

The work of gilding and decorating this church took over seventy years and was completed in 1682. Tradition has it that nothing was spared in costliness and grandeur in the embellishment of this church. Statues and remnants of columns, are standing witnesses to the truth of this tradition.

It may be interesting here to add, that at this period (1680) the population of the parish had increased to "1,300 souls," that the village consisted of "300 hearths" and that the clergy numbered "4 priests besides the Pastor."

3. This old church was successively governed by the following Parish-Priests :

* Some of the pictures once placed over these altars may still be found in the Sacristy of the Modern Church.

† Ferris O.C. Chiesa Parrocchiale della Musta.

List of Parish Priests.

NAME OF PARISH PRIEST.	PERIOD OF OFFICE.	ELECTED BY ARCHBISHOP
V. R. Don Giovanni Bezzina	July 16th, 1610—November 29th, 1617	Monsignor Garcallo
„ Don Salvatore Muscat, L.L.D.	1618—June 29th, 1647	„ Cagliares
„ Dr. Don Carlo Schembri*	August, 1647—1671	„ Balaguer
„ Don Giovanni Battista Schembri	March 25th, 1671—June, 1675	„ Astiria
„ Dr. Don Schembri (re-appointed)	July, 1675—1678	„ „
„ Don Salvatore Dimech	June, 1679—February 4th, 1697	„ Molina
„ Dr. Don Lorenzo Abela†	July 14th, 1697—February 28th, 1742	„ Cocco Palmieri
„ Don Giovanni Angelo Sammut‡	April 20th, 1742—March 26th, 1758	„ Alpheran
„ Don Salvatore Pace	July, 1758—1759	„ „

* The CHURCH OF ST. SYLVESTER, P.C. was built during his first tenure of office, through the bounty of the Knight Sylvester Fiteni. This little church possesses a beautiful picture over its altar, and the inscription over its door is particularly interesting ; it runs thus :

FITENI SYLVESTER EQVES
SYLVESTRIBVS AGRIS
DIVO SYLVESTRO DAT DICAT
IPSE DOMVM 1664

† He was also Professor of Hebrew and Arabic. Silver lamps and various legacies still testify to his generosity.

‡ His portrait may be seen hanging on the sacristy walls of the modern church, like his predecessor, he was a great benefactor.

LIST OF PARISH PRIESTS.—(Continued.)

NAME OF PARISH PRIEST.	PERIOD OF OFFICE.	ELECTED BY ARCHBISHOP
„ Don Enrico Audibert, S.T.D. §	July, 1759—1764	By Rome
„ Don Filippo Guglielmo Seychell	January, 1764—January 22nd, 1771	Monsignor Rull
„ Don Salvatore Saverio Bonnici °	May 30th, 1771—January 16th, 1794	„ Pellerano
„ Don Guiseppe Farrugia	April 1794—1797	„ Labini
„ Don Felice Calleja. S.T.D.	February 1797—See Part III.	„ „

§ The first to wear choral robes, since distinctive of parish priests in Malta. The well-known SANCTUARY OF OUR LADY OF GOOD HOPE was raised during his pastorship. It stands right over a small rocky cave, on the southern outskirts of the village—according to a beautiful tradition, which Ferris also relates, it was the result or accomplishment of a promise made to God by a maiden from Musta, who had been providentially shielded, within the recess below, through the Blessed Virgin's powerful intercession, against the evil intents of Moorish pirates, who had been following her hither from her father's farm at 'Sur-Murrad' close to 'Salini' Bay. The church was opened for public service in 1760.

|| He entered into office when still a Deacon, and died in it at 39 years of age.

° He was fortunate to assist at the SOLEMN CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH, BY ARCHBISHOP PELLERANO, ON APRIL 7TH, 1774; the anniversary of this touching ceremony was afterwards kept on the Second Sunday after Easter.

It is due to the zeal of this Pastor, that the parish can still boast of the possession of a whole Skeleton relic of a Martyr Saint, which was found in one of the Catacombs in Rome in the early Centuries of the Church. The Veneration of this relic was Sanctioned by a Decree issued by Mons. Labini, dated Aug. 30th, 1787. The Saint was to be invoked as St. Pacificus, and since then he has been chosen as secondary Patron to the Parish. Cf. Ferris. O. C. At present, it may be seen enclosed within a special nich, constructed over the altar in the choir of the modern church.

Third Part.

A History of Patriotism and Practical Piety.

It was during Dr. Felice Calleja's tenure of office that the history of this parish began to win world-wide fame. About the year 1812 the villagers first conceived the idea of enlarging their church, which, owing to their increasing numbers, had long been failing to provide sufficient accommodation for all. They were warmly seconded in the idea by their pastor: but the cholera and various other local disastrous consequences again and again protracted a definite start.

Meanwhile various plans and designs from divers Maltese Architects had been secured.

It happened that their purpose had reached the knowledge of a clever engineer from Valletta, **George Grongnet de Vasse**, by name; and he set to work to design a most detailed plan for a church, which when complete, could compete in size and grandeur with the great Pantheon of Agrippa in Rome. * To this design he appended full explanations † as well as several demonstrations ‡ of its theoretical and practical working.

In earlier years he had left his mother-isle to serve under Napoleon-the-Great in Egypt as military engineer; and now we find him boldly offering his intellectual services to a poor and quiet parish at home.

Fortunately the ultimate choice of his plan depended to a great extent on the Parish Priest's approval—Dr. Calleja had in former years completed his theological studies in Rome and had said one of his first Masses in the Pantheon which Grongnet strove to reproduce. It is believed that the sight of such a design revived within him the happiest memories of his life, and that these greatly induced him to resolve upon its adoption, in preference to all the rest.

* See plans of Musta Dome facing page 20.

† The numbers on one of these plans clearly indicate corresponding explanations—locally it is believed that these formed a large manuscript, since disappeared.

‡ cf. "Grongnet Confuta Fergusson" wherein some of these documents were published for the first time by the compiler in defence of their author against one or two unjust insinuations by James Fergusson. (History of Modern Styles of Architecture Vol I, 3rd Ed. p. 46 and 47).



V. R. Dr. Felice Calleja, P.P.
THE FOUNDER OF THE GLORY OF MUSTA.
(After a painting by Prof. Caruana).

V. R. Don Giovanni Maria Schembri,
MUSTA'S GREAT SON.
The ruling Prelate during the construction
of its Great Church.
(After a painting by Prof. G. Gallucci)



George Grongnet de Vasse.

Architect Engineer of Musta.

Another reason, which gave considerable weight to his choice, was: that the new church could be built around and over the old one, without interfering with it, in order that the parishoners might worship in the church of their forefathers till the new edifice was ready for Divine Service.

The Pastor next proposed Grongnet's idea to his flock; and after meeting with their approval, we read of him setting a magnificent first example of practical love by personally opening a subscription for its accomplishment, assigning 16,000 scudi (£1,333, very great for the period,) from his personal assets.

Great as his desire was to see the work started, he nevertheless found no small difficulty in combating the opinion of a few, who tried directly and otherwise to urge their disuasions on the ground that it would be most difficult if not practically impossible to carry out such elaborate and expensive a plan.

It is now grateful to record the noble stand of this great father of his people, and his firm resolve to offer to God and His most Holy Mother the best tenement possible, as well as to his flock the chance of erecting the noblest monument of their long-standing love for their parish.

To further strengthen such a high ideal we read of him appealing to the Governor of the Island, Sir F. Cavendish Ponsonby, who, after taking the opinion of a special commission, composed of four Military and Civil experts, not only approved of his resolve but even commended Grongnet's learned and detailed designs. This heroic founder of what now stands as "Musta's Glory" was not destined to witness his labours crowned by the inauguration of the material work in his life time.

All difficulties, usually preliminary to the start of a new temple, were practically eliminated only shortly after his death, which plunged his beloved parish into the deepest mourning on February 26th 1833, in the 82nd year of his age and the 36th, of his pastorate. After a most impressive funeral his dear remains were laid to rest in the old church, thence to be afterwards transported to the Chapel of the Holy Rosary in the new church.

During the last ten years of his life he had a spiritual coadjutor in the person of the **V. R. Don Giovanni**

Maria Schembri, and happily this zealous son of **Musta** was formally installed as its spiritual head by **Mons. F. Caruana's** Vicar General on March 10th of the same year, in his succession.

He was to carry on, and fittingly accomplish the great work initiated by his less fortunate predecessor.

After two months he was to witness and assist at the definite commencement of the church.

30 On May 8th, 1833, the Foundation Stone was laid with every circumstance of ceremonial and impressive observance by the Arch-Bishop's Delegate, Archdeacon Mons. Dr. Salvatore Lanzon, then Vicar General of the Diocese.* The ceremony included the blessing of the stone and the foundations of the new church.

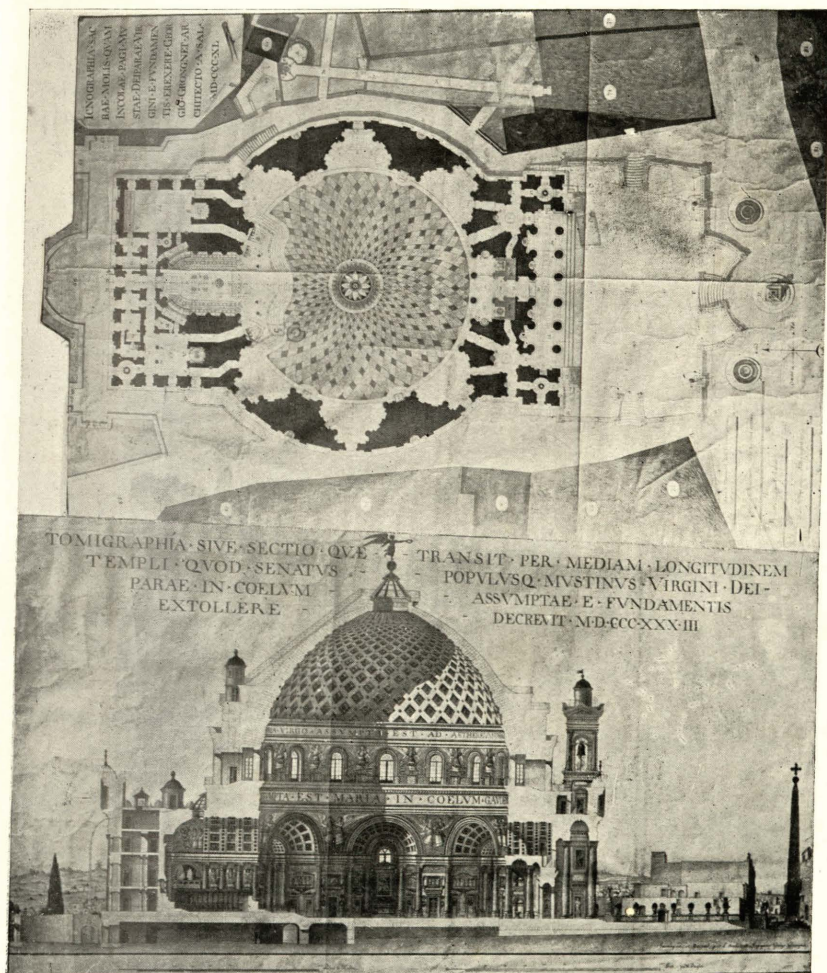
Ferris describes this event at length and says that the function was of a very imposing character, and that it attracted a great number of people from every part of the island. General Ponsonby† with many Dignitaries and Civil Authorities assisted at the event from a special stand, attached to the presbytery and elegantly decked with buntings of Papal and Anglo-national flags and festoons by the villagers, whose enthusiasm gave vent that evening to repeated ovations at the arrival and departure of their distinguished guests.

* Record of this ceremony is kept in the "Acta Curiae Civitatis Vallettae, 1833 as follows:—*Illustrissimus et Reverendissimus Dominus Don Salvator Lanzon, Sacrae Theologiae Doctor, archidiaconus Sanctae Cathedralis et archiepiscopalis Ecclesiae Melivetanae, et Excellentissimi et Reverendissimi Archiepiscopi Rhodi, hujus Melivetanae Diocesis Episcopi Don Francisci Xaverii Caruana Vicarius Generalis, interveniens uti expresse deputatus a praelaudato Exmo et Rmo Dmo virtute adnexi instrumenti* (Nos Don Franciscus Xaverius Caruana) *existens in Platea Terrae Mustae, ubi populus hujusmodi pagi intendit Novam Ecclesiam, Sub Invocatione Assumptionis Beatae Mariae Virginis, aedificare, ubi crux lignea erecta conspicebatur: indutus amictu, alba, stola, pluviali albi coloris, et mitra, exorcizata cum sale, aqua lapidem primum benedictum, in fundamento ipsius ecclesiae, servata forma in Rituali Romano praescripta, populo adstante, Sollemniter posuit; et mandavit mihi Cancellario infrascripto ut de praemissis publicum instrumentum conficerem prout rogatus fui; Praesentibus, Reverendissimo Domino Canonico Cantore Coadjutore Sanctae Cathedralis Ecclesiae Don Josepho Sapiano, Jris Vque Dre, Joanne Baptista Mifsud Medicinæ Dre, Xaverio Galea Jris Vque Dre, Notaro Francisco Chetcuti et quam plurimis aliis e clero et populo interventibus et adstantibus unde ita est*

Sacerdos Fortunatus Dalli

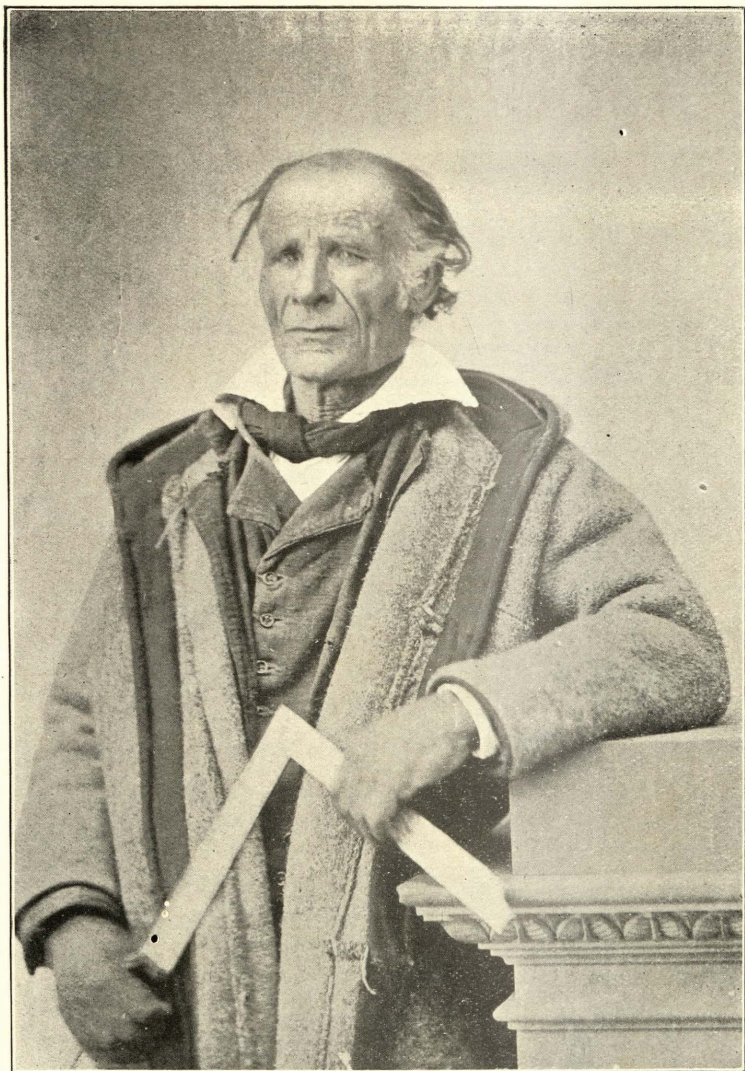
Cancellarius etc., etc., etc.

† This was about the third visit of His Excellency to this parish. After this occasion he is still remembered to have further encouraged the villagers by sending over cranes and iron work to help on their work.



Reproduction of the Original Plans for Musta Dome.

As designed by the hand of the Architect Engineer, George Grongnet de Vasse, of Valletta, Malta.



With kind permission of his son, Mario Gatt.

Maestro Angelo Gatt,
Builder of Musta Church.

Stirring and beautiful was the discourse delivered on that memorable afternoon by the officiating Prelate, who greatly encouraged the good villagers to carry out the generous promise they were then implicitly making, of their heroic enterprise of Love for the God of their Fathers, His Holy Virgin Mother and for their cherished Parish!

The **work of erection** was soon commenced under the direction of master-mason Giuseppe Mangion, a native of the neighbouring parish of Birchircara: but after a few years it was taken over by his assistant MAESTRO ANGELO GATT.

This man, like a master-mason in the middle ages, could neither read nor write; but following his own constructive instincts and dictates of common sense has succeeded in remaining at his post to complete the work of closing the dome. With true mediæval enthusiasm this extraordinary man was content to devote his whole time to the erection of this great edifice receiving a scanty salary for twenty years and in the end was quite satisfied with 2/- a day.

The stone material was cut and procured from quarries dug on the outskirts of the village.

Meanwhile neither pastor nor his people spared any effort to help in every possible way the speedy erection of their new church. Don Giovanni Maria was continually to be seen on the scene of work from dawn to dusk, having an encouraging word for all: the people denied themselves the rest, they merited so well, and obtained ecclesiastical permission to work for a few hours on Sundays and Festivals.

It is touching to record that women and grown up children contributed no small part of the labour in supplying the men with water and mortar. In short the building was a work of love so practical that after a few years, in 1841, one third of the total height of the church was complete. The parish priest, justly proud of the zeal of his flock, with undaunted confidence and keen insight, guided them safely out of great difficulties; and his prudent tact obtained from the then reigning Sovereign Pontiff, Gregory XVI. a bull on behalf of their church, enabling Archbishop Mons. Publio Maria dei Conti Sant to grant the parish an annuity of 3000 scudi (£250) out of the funds of the Diocese for ten successive years.

The **building of the dome** over this church, forms by itself a marvel of architecture: for no scaffolding was used and neither stone nor wooden work was set up to direct its

curvature. It was done by simply notching each course to the one below: in other words, when the circular foundation on which the dome rests was finished, the first row of the dome was built with heavy blocks of stone, having one edge cut off, so as to give the right concavity, and so placed as to overlap their supports by one third of their length: then another layer was built on this, overlapping it in the same way. This process went on until the dome was completed.

The whole church was brought to a finish * just in time, before the death of its devoted Rector, which occurred on Sept. 28th. 1859.

Don Giovanni M. Schembri left almost all his property on behalf of its embellishment. The elders of the village still remember the pathetic scenes, enacted at his most impressive funeral. During a touching oration, delivered in Maltese by the **V. R. Don Antonio Mallia**, his successor a month later, on Oct. 24th, the good parishioners could restrain their sobs no longer. He was first laid to rest in the old church alongside of his predecessor and later on removed to a special sepulchre in the Chapel of the Crucifixion where he lies at present.

Both these great Pastors and the other two heroes—George Grongnet de Vassé and Mro: Angelo Gatt have received tributes of affection from the grateful villagers in the spontaneous erection of monuments to their beloved memories.

* The history of the erection has been commemorated by an Epigraph, inscribed over a Marble slab placed in front of the South Belfry—the inscription is as follows:—

D. O. M.

TEMPLVM- HOC- NOBILISSIMVM
STRUCTVRA- ATQVE- AMPLITVDINE
ROMANI- PANTHEOS- ÆMVLVM
CURIO- JO'MARIA- SCHEMBRI- MVSTINVS
PARTIM- EX- INGENTI- FORTVNA
A-CVRIONE- FELICE CALLEJA- TESTAM: LEGATA
PARTIM- EX- ÆRE- SVO- ET- COLLATO
GEOGIO- GRONGNET- DE- VASSÉ- ARCHITECTO
A- SOLO- EXCITANDUM- CURAVIT
LAPIS- AUSPICALIS- STATUTUS- FUIT
III- CALENDAS- JUN: AN: MDCCCXXXIII
FORNIX- ABSOLUTA
PRÆTER- OMNIUM- EXPECTATIONEM
AN: MDCCCLX

After twenty seven years' work, on Feb. 16th, 1860, the new parish priest V. R. Don Antonio Mallia, after special delegation * by Archbishop Pace Forno, formally blessed the new church. He was also enabled to announce from the altar rails that it was time to pull down the old church, which had stood within: all which was done between the 16th and the 26th of the same month.

Holy Mass was first celebrated at the high altar of the Old Church, * then placed in its new position in the rear of the choir, by the Right Rev. Canon Mons. Dr. Michael Angelo Mifsud † On Sunday March 11th. 1860, Archbishop, Mons. Fra. Gaetano Pace Forno made his first solemn entry into the church, when he also intoned a Solemn "Te Deum" in thanksgiving for its happy completion.

Don Antonio Mallia, still remembered for his untiring zeal for his flock, was more fortunate to repeat further welcome to the same Diocesan, on occasion of the blessing and consecration to God's holy service, of the second largest of the present set of bells on Oct. 18th. 1863: and again of the largest one "Maria Assumta" in 1864.

His Grace once more visited this parish to perform the touching ceremony of the Solemn Consecration of its Great Temple. ‡ This took place on the evening of Oct 13th. and lasted through the night till the morrow Oct. 14th, 1871.

The prominent style of this church is Corinthian; as viewed from behind at a distance and by a fortunate though perhaps unintended coincidence, it gives one an idea of a massive imperial crown, which could be happily interpreted as symbolical of the Blessed Virgin's heavenly coronation after her glorious Assumption. The interior too as viewed from the top, forms the shape of an eight-peaked star, supporting an immense dome: here too it is beautiful to

* Record of this is kept in the "Acta Curiae Civitatis Vallaetæ, 1860"

† This worthy son of Musta was then Vicar General of Malta—He is still remembered for his patriotism and generosity, as manifest in the decoration of the chapel of St. Paul, where he was also afterwards interred together with other members of his respectable family—Over his monument may be seen his bust in white marble. It is believed that he had been elected Auxiliary Bishop on the day of his unexpected death.

‡ Record of this is kept by the following inscription on a marble slab within the church

IN HONOREM
VIRG: MARIE SIDERIBVS RECEPTÆ
etc., etc., etc.,



suppose a change from the ordinary shape of a Latin Cross for a church dedicated to the "Fair Star of the Morning."

Comparing the Actual church with the original designs it will be seen that several deviations have been made; these it is believed were due to economic considerations.

Some of these were allowed by the architect, while others were imposed upon him and documents still exist which prove the complaints and regrets of the great Engineer for such "mutilations" of his learned designs.*

Contrary to a Modern Historian's opinion; the WHOLE church was raised UNDER THE PERSONAL, WHOLE HEARTED, not to add, and AT TIMES HEROIC SUPERVISION OF GRONGNET.†

It is estimated that the church can hold a standing congregation of 12,000 persons. It contains six chapels:—

NORTH SIDE.

Those of St. Sebastian,
Sts. Roch and Rosalia,
St. Joseph,
Crucifixion,

SOUTH SIDE.

Our Lady of Consolation,
(of the H. Girdle),
St. Paul the Apostle,
The Holy Rosary,

The High Altar, preceded by a vast Sanctuary, with a large choir in its background, and another altar at the end of this choir. Two sacristies and other convenient apartments form the rear of this edifice.

Since the pastorate of Don A. Mallia the work of embellishing this temple speedily followed and made steady progress during the regency of these first four of his immediate successors: the V. Rs. Don Francesco Camilleri of Musta (1876-1885), Don Lorenzo Sciberras (March 5th—Aug 22nd 1886,) Dr. Don Paolo Xuereb ‡ (July 26th 1887—Nov. 22nd 1894), and Dr. Don Giovanni Sarreo. Marble Altars were presented to the chapels by their respective Confraternities, or benefactors, as in the case of that of St. Paul's by Mons. Mifsud.

These chapels were also provided with large pictures; thus: That of St. Sebastian, with the central picture representing St. Sebastian, St. Rosalia and St. Roch—painted by Erardi—the gift of Don Giovanni Maria Galea; and two

* Cf. "Grongnet Confuta Fergusson" 1911—Edited and published by the Compiler.

† This aged scholar and eminent engineer, whose abilities were fully acknowledged by the Local Government by the grant of a special pension to him on the occasion of the late King Edward's visit to the Island, as Prince of Wales, in June 1862, died on Sept. 5th. following. He was buried in the chapel of Our Lady of the Girdle, the first on the left entering the church which rendered his name illustrious.

‡ He was the first to enjoy the title of "Arciprete della Rotonda" since then borne by his successors.

lateral paintings representing St. Roch in the act of administering to the plague stricken, and the Trial of St. Sebastian, by Raffaele Caruana, were subscribed for by the people.

St. Joseph's, with The Espousal of the Saint (painted by the Maltese Giuseppe Bonnici at Rome in 1859); Death of St. Joseph (the work of the Maltese Salvatore Barbara, 1861, the author of the beautiful Espousal of St. Catherine still hanging on the Sacristy walls), and the Flight into Egypt (by Bonnici 1866.) All three the gift of the brothers, Mons: Canons Giuseppe and Girolamo and Don Salvatore Chetcuti.*

The Chapel of the Crucifixion, with the "Crucifixion," "The Agony" and the "Burial" of Our Lord, painted by Carlo Ignazio Cortis, at the expense of Sodalists.

The Rosary-chapel was also embellished with a set of three pictures of Our Lady, St. Dominic and St. Catherine of Siena, from the young hand of Giuseppe Cali, all the gift of the Confraternity.

The Conversion of St. Paul—his Martyrdom and Cure of Publius' Father—form the subjects of three other paintings for St. Paul's Chapel, commissioned to Barbara in 1864 by Dr. Giovanni Battista Mifsud.

Finally to the Chapel of Our Lady of Consolation were also given two Pictures representing "St. Monica, mother of St. Augustine," and "The African Doctor's Death," both painted by G. Cali at the expense of the Confraternity. Its central picture is a Replica of a former smaller though far superior one by the Maltese Erardi. The original still hangs in the Sacristy and the Copy is by Barbara in 1866, and is the gift of Archbishop Pace Forno. The principal or Titular Picture of the Church is the same, mentioned in Part II. It was restored by Giuseppe Hyzler in 1827 and previous to its collocation in its present place, it was enlarged and retouched by Barbara in about the year 1864. To-day it counts over 230 years since its first appearance.

Meanwhile the good people contributed generously towards the gildings and the wall decorations of their church. Seven Bells were provided. A clock was presented by Dr. Oreste Grech Mifsud C.M.G. An imposing balus-

* These illustrious sons of Musta were well known for their piety and learning. Mons. Giuseppe was Professor of Moral Theology at the Malta University.

trade of Gray Marble was also made to enclose the sanctuary, at the expense of a local priest Don Giuseppe Mamo. *

Public subscription also furnished: the choir stalls; large statue of the Assumption, (carved from olive-wood by Salvatore Dimech in 1868) borne in Procession on the village principal Festa around the Parish; the painting of the Apse by young Giuseppe Cali; the great Organ, † which cost over £900. Various other embellishments, such as Passion Statues and two very beautiful French-made statues of St. Joseph and the Madonna Addolorata. In 1889 the dome was closed by a lantern: ‡ it is a pity that even here Grongnet's design was disregarded, though experts declare that its execution would have been a wonder of art.

After this we find the villagers generously contributing towards the magnificence of the altars and chapels. A glance at the illustration of the interior of this church will realise what is impossible to describe and give a clear idea of the reality of the effects produced in recent years by the good will and practical faith of the present generation of Musta.

The paintings by Cali, as evident from the crest over the lunette of the Resurrection, were added by the private contribution of Parish Priest Dr. Paolo Xuereb in 1900-2. The silver lamp and altar fronts visible were designed by Mr. R. Caruana Dingli who also designed a very costly canopy used on Corpus Christi, as well as the Tabernacle Veil seen on the high altar in the illustration, and the pavements of the Sanctuary and choir in marble; the latter's expenses were covered by the special subscriptions of the actual clergy of the Parish.

In 1906 the V. Rev. Dr. Don Giovanni Sarreo was promoted to Canon of the Cathedral Chapter of Malta and Protonotary Apostolic, and consequently was succeeded by the V. R. Don Paolo Mallia, late Canon of San Paolo Naufrago,

* He also left a legacy to provide special Spiritual Exercises.

† This organ was constructed in 1885 and completed in Sept. 8th by the maker of the world famous organ of Cremona Cathedral, Chevalier Pacifico Inzoli. It boasts of 1,915 pipes controlled by 58 registers.

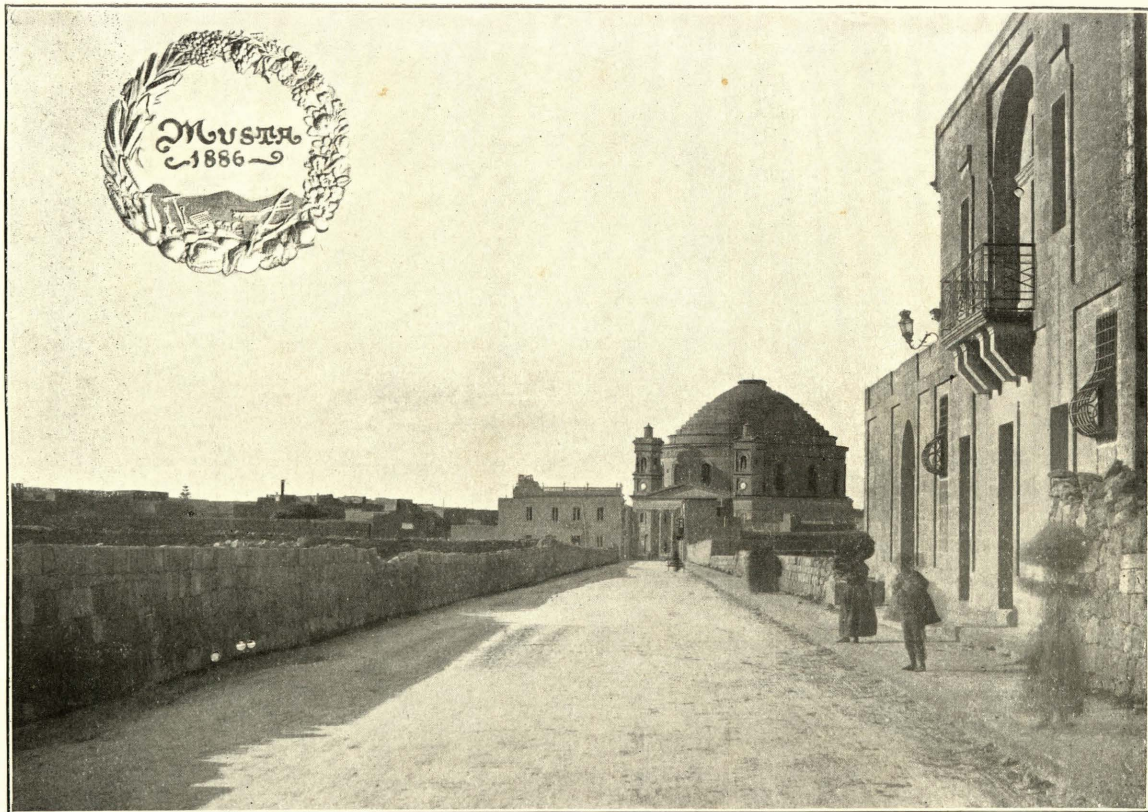
‡ Inscription on marble slab over front of North Belfry commemorates this thus:

D. O. M.

AN : CHRISTI MDCCLXXXIX

HVIVS SACRÆ ÆDIS LATERNAM

etc., etc., etc.,



Musta. Main Road, known as Via Nuova Valletta.

The illustration shows how it was in 1886, since then all the fields seen in the foreground have been replaced by quite another small and modernly-built village.



The Fine Art Studio.

Musta Church, (Interior) Decked for Titular Feast.

Note Statue of Blessed Virgin (on right of picture) which is carried in procession round the Parish on August 15th; large silver lamp in middle, and Chapel of the Crucifixion on left; Floor strewn with fresh leaves in token of joyful respect, as customary in Maltese Churches on Feast Days.



Photo by A. Serracino, Senglea.

Musta Church—High Altar.

As may be seen on August 14th and 15th, Titular Feast-days of the Parish. Note the four Evangelists and SS. Peter and Paul in place of flowers, also silver altar-front and embroidered canopy with gilt silver reliquary.

Valletta. Since then the Parishoners have redoubled their efforts to complete the lower half of their church's embellishments. And, pending the completion of the actual pavement of the whole floor in marble and the erection of two white marble statues of the Evangelists St. John and St. Luke over the Sanctuary, they will soon be able to boast of a present equal to the glorious past of their Ancestors for the noble and heroic finish of the church which forms with truest justice the "**Glory of their long standing Piety and Patriotism.**"



Fourth Part.

Wied el Ghasel, Environs, Cumbo Palace and Villas.

If the Visitor or Tourist has time he may ask to be shown the way to, what has now come to be commonly called, MUSTA BRIDGE. He will then be directed to a modern road, which conducts him to a small iron bridge, that stretches across a little vale called "Wied EL GASHEL" (Valley of Honey). Its name is perhaps derived from the local tradition that this place, owing to its wilderness once formed a literal bee-hive. The visitor to the bridge will behold a rocky gorge with lofty cliffs on either side studded here and there with pigmy fig and carob trees. During the winter months, when a wild torrent of lengthy rains fills the whole bottom of the ravine, this little vale "might almost be mistaken for a mountain glen in Wales or Bonnie Scotland." * Within one of its recesses to the north of the bridge is the old and interesting chapel of St. Paul the Hermit, mentioned in Part I.

2. Almost parallel to this chapel, and accessible by a staircase, family parties and holiday makers will find a pretty and quiet resort in a fresh and shady cave; this recess was a favourite with the Grandmasters, who would love to come and drink of the water which trickled from its roof on to a stone trough within it. During the Spring and sunny days in winter it forms an ideal place for an ideal vista.

* "The Maltese Islands" by Rev Goodwin, C. F.

3. Close to it overhead and across the road in the middle of a field the tourists or holiday makers will find a very good specimen of a Dolmen or Megalithic Monument,* with ruins of another, near by. It may be interesting to add that many other antiquities were also discovered during the construction of a neighbouring fort over "Misrah Ghonok" (Plain of Giants)—as a matter of fact remains of hugh skeletons were unearthed.

4. The Cumbo Palace or "Tower," as it is known on the the spot, is a modern substitute for an old Manor belonging to the old Maltese Family "Cumbo." The tradition that in its stead once rose the abode of the Bride of Musta, stolen by the Arab followers of RAJES SINAM in 1526 makes it a place of special note. The entrance or quadrangle is particularly attractive, and the grounds have rich orange-groves.

5. Musta can also boast of two beautiful modern Villas, the country seats of the Grech-Mifsud and Gollcher Families. Both possess rich flower-gardens and orange groves.

Adjacent to Villa Mifsud is a spacious Government Elementary School—recently erected in a new street which has since been named after the Great Grongnet.

Page	Line	Erratum	Corrige
7.	4.	interfered with in -	interpreted as effects of

To title at foot of Illustration, facing pag. 19, add
- New Parish Church -

*Similar monuments are described in § 61 of Prof. Carnana's "Frammento Critico," as erected by the Phœnicians, in about 1500 B. C.

Visitors' Handy Notes

ON MUSTA DOME.

This Church had its foundation stone laid on May 30th, 1833. It was completed in 1863, and consecrated on October 14th, 1871.

DIMENSIONS :-

1.) External.

Extreme height — 202 feet.

Width of Façade — 122 feet, 6 inches.

The Columns of Portico are 39 feet high.

The Breadth of the surrounding walls at the base is not less than 28 feet.

2.) Internal.

Extreme Height — 184 feet.

Height of Chapels — 50 „ 7 inches.

Columns are 27 feet high.

Extreme length 193 feet.

Diameter of floor 169 feet.

Diameter excluding chapels 130 feet.

Width of Chapels — 31 feet, 5 inches.

The dome is higher internally than that of the Pantheon at Rome, but about 20 feet less in diameter. It however exceeds in diameter that of St. Paul's, London, by 16 feet.

Length of Sacristies 41 feet.

Height of Sacristies 25 feet.

It is estimated that the church can hold a standing congregation of 12,000 persons.