

MILITARY DISTURBANCES

AT

M A L T A .



It was with inexpressible grief that I had to witness the occurrences which have lately taken place at the Opera, and in the streets of Valetta. I feel humbled to the dust when I consider that the cause of the mischief was the ill-breeding, the unspeakable vulgarity, of some addle-pated individuals, whom I feel degraded to own as Countrymen and Brothers-in-arms.

The circumstance of their being young, thoughtless, and dissipated, may apologies for their disgraceful behaviour, but this cannot be urged by the Military Authorities in justification of the indifference evinced by them to enforce the Laws and Regulations with which our service furnishes them for the discipline of our Army.

In fact, I cannot account for the line of conduct invariably pursued by the Officers in Command at this place. The Government at home is trying every means to conciliate the feelings of this peaceable population towards us; and when we peruse the pages of the history of our Dominion (if it can be called so) at this Island, our numerous misdeeds, which this People has borne with a patience unparalleled, we are forced to admit that this is a policy highly commendable, and should have been adopted from the very first day our national colours were unfurled on these magnificent Battlements. But the feelings of our Home Government seem not to actuate the Authorities at this place in the least, their study is to devise plans and concoct measures best suited to annoy, insult, and excite this population. Who can understand, or reconcile such contradictory proceedings?

The Maltese now, appear to me, however, to be determined to arrest acts of aggression on our part, and to insist upon a fulfilment of the

promises we most solemnly made to them. Daily events prove this fact to us. They are determined to replace themselves in their proper position with regard to us and to exact those marks of esteem and consideration which are due from the *Guest* to his *Host*. It is therefore most detrimental to our best interests as a nation, not to submit and conform ourselves to their notions of propriety and decency; and from what I have seen in the late disgraceful occurrences, (disgraceful on our part) it is most dangerous to our personal safety to misbehave ourselves and not to pay that respect so justly due to this indulgent, patient, civil, and loyal people. We are deeply indebted to the Maltese; the History of Europe bears witness to this assertion.

— Are we to pay our debts with insults? Are we to go in Public and so far forget ourselves as to raise our feet to a level with our noses? Bring disgrace on ourselves by being hooted and hissed out of an Opera House? Afford an opportunity to the Maltese to wreak their vengeance upon us? If the culprits have been successful to defy the Police in attempting to force them out of the Opera House for unofficer-like and ungentleman-like conduct, pray, were they the like successful in defying the handful of Maltese whom they attacked in Strada Teatro on last Monday night? I was delighted to see these

military noodles, although armed with sticks and shillalahs, and keeping close together, tumble down and be trampled upon by a dozen Maltese who were *unprepared* and *unarmed*.

I had heretofore a conviction that no one in the world could resist our fists, but I must consign the Palm of Victory to several of the youngmen whom I saw on Monday last; to one, in particular, with a long black beard, who did tremendous mischief, and fought like a *lion*. I hope my well rubbed Countrymen will long retain the impression of the bravery of the *Smaiches* (as they call them in contempt) and from the state in which they retired from the field, learn to behave better in future. The Maltese, from what I observe, are not to be trifled with, and my Brothers-in-arms must now be perfectly convinced of this *stubborn fact*, particularly a certain Naval Officer on half pay, whose bald head, having lost his straw hat in the shuffle, was the most conspicuous object in last Monday's dense crowd. I was glad to see him come across the Herculean arms of the black bearded fellow, who laid into him to his heart's content. I hope the Jolly Tar is now satisfied that the Maltese are rather tough, and that he has acquired a little more sense not to venture again on such other occasions, but I am afraid he is one of those who remain harebrained in spite of age and experience.

If a dozen Maltese, unarmed, could drive of the field 40 or 50 (armed and keeping together) well rubbed, well marked, and one well bitten (in a part decency forbids me mentioning) what would a greater number of them do when furnished with the requisites for a shuffle?

I beseech you, my Brother Officers, to desist from similar proceedings, to avoid coming in contact in so disgraceful a manner with our neighbours, the Maltese. Be candid, we are always the aggressors. The Maltese are naturally very peaceable and civil to every one who approaches them in a friendly spirit. I have never met, in the whole course of my life, with better treatment than that I experience from the Maltese. The attentions I receive from every individual, whatever his class may be, are such that I cannot but acknowledge with heart-felt gratitude. My secret is that of studying my behaviour to them. Restore yourselves to a sense of your peculiar position with reference to the Maltese, and do not disgrace yourselves and your uniform, by exciting ill feeling towards us in this really interesting People.

I feel it my duty to call upon the Military Authorities to exercise their power, and enforce the Laws and Regulations of our service, so as to check effectively every act of *Military Ruffianism* tending to destroy our best interests in this

Possession, and not to pass unnoticed the misconduct of our young thoughtless Officers to this quiet and hospitable People. It is the duty of the Commanding Officers, as loyal subjects of Her Majesty, to conform their line of conduct to the political tone of Her Majesty's Government, and to see that the same spirit prevails in those under their command.

I should have called at once upon the Officer wielding the Chief Command to do his duty, but we have ample proofs of his inefficiency in all the bearings of his important situation; besides, I have reasons to doubt his friendly feelings towards the Maltese. The only refuge I can see for him, to retire *honorably* from this Command, is that of ordering a Medical Board to assemble, and submit himself to an examination. I am certain he would be invalided, and deemed unfit for further service from *mental debility*. The board would perhaps also recommend that the sooner a change take place the better.

“— ’tis a consummation

“Devoutly to be wished.”

I take this opportunity of encouraging the Maltese to unite themselves in a Body, and resist every incursion which my thoughtless and dissipated Countrymen may make upon their Rights, and to punish them severely whenever they

refuse to conform themselves, in Public, to the Maltese notions of propriety and decency.

Maltese ! be conscious of your own power as a People, and let the conduct of your Fathers when under oppression, which has rendered them conspicuous in the History of Europe, be an incentive to you for deeds of honor and of bravery in the defence of your Rights and just claims, and in the exaction of our solemn promises, as expressed to you by our Majesty's successive Representatives.

I have no doubt that I will be condemned by my Countrymen for this candid expression of my opinion on the late affrays, but I cannot any longer do violence to my feelings for the Maltese, and have therefore determined to make them public.

AN OFFICER OF THE GARRISON.
