MALTA AND ITS GOVERNMENT.

5 Settember 1882.

To the Editor of the *Times*.

Sir,

In taking up the consideration of the resolution recently moved in the House of Commons by Mr. George Anderson respecting the administration of the Government of Malta, it is my most anxious desire to write in a spirit of fairness and impartiality, and to point out the facts relating to it with that freedom which the importance of the subject unquestionably requires.

Whilst thanking Honorable Members of the House of Commons for their good intentions in endeavouring to promote what they have been made to look upon as the true interest of this loyal population, it is much to be deprecated that they should have accepted a wrong line of action probably suggested by persons in this Island who should have directed better Mr. Anderson's mind, and called his attention to a more serious circumstance than the existence of an Italian party in Malta, which only exists in their imagination.

That the long tried loyalty of the people of Malta to British Rule deserves much more consideration than it has hitherto received is a point upon which all parties are agreed; and my colleagues and myself are indebted to Mr. Anderson for having thus prominently brought forward the claims of the Maltese people. Mr. Anderson however, is in error in several of the statements he made, and no doubt it is to the absence of reliable information that his failure is to be attributed. It may be of importance to remind H. M's. Government and the Members of the House of Commons that the several numerously signed petitions of the people of Malta, far from requesting the changes which have upset and revolutionized all the Departments of Government without exception prove that what the Elected Members of the Council and the people asked was:—

1. A Civilian Governor.

2. A reform in the constitution of the Council of Government.

The superiority of an able ad experienced statesman over a Military Officer, however distinguished he may be, cannot be underrated. I concur with Mr. Ashley in taking this to be a most burning question for Imperial interest; but this Community look upon it as being the more important in consequence of the present unjudicious system of wishing to govern Malta from the Colonial Office.

A reform in the constitution of the Legislative Council is indeed the key note of the whole question, and might probably leave no pretence to the existence of an Executive Council.

England it is true, had given us a Legislative Council, the importance of which, instead of being determined by the issues which the Council has been called upon to decide, should rather be determined by those which the Government have decided either without consulting it at all, or when consulted, this was done as a matter

of form, the course to be pursued on any questions having previously been laid down by the Segretary of State irrespective of the opinions which may be expressed by the Elected Members.

This is the policy which H. M's. Government has been pleased to follow; and it is an undoubted fact that the Council of Government has now sunk from being the most important estate of the country, to the degrading position of a tool in the hands of the Colonial Office; and that it has descended from the high position which the British Constitution granted to it, to be the mere echo of decisions in which the representatives of the people are allowed no voice. While this shameful abdication of a great constitutional mission has been accomplished not a single Member of the House, not even Mr. Anderson has risen to remind H. M's Government that this policy is not only ruinous but lays the axe to the very root of the Constitution—the mutual confidence between the executive and the taxing power.

This want of consideration to the opinion of the people and their representatives in matters purely local has made the Council to be looked upon as an utter farce. It is solely owing to this cause that six Members of the Council threatened to send in their resignation in their letter addressed to the Secretary of State in June last; and the result of the last partial election of a Member, far from being a sunb to Sir Victor Houlton or the lo cal Governmennt, was simply intended to show that the continual meddlesomeness of the Secretary of State in demestic matters cannot be any longer tolerated.

Mr. Anderson and Mr. Ashley alike seem to think that an extension of the franchise would to some extent improve matters. But in this they are sadly mistaken. I shall not dwell on the point raised by Mr. Anderson in support of his Resolution whether the extension of the Electoral franchise may be best secured by the abolition of the language test. This is a subject which requires

much calmer andweightier consideration than Mr. Anderson appears to have given to it; and I reserve my opinion as to the way in which the electoral law may be advantageously modified. It is however, an established fact that the *sic volo sic jubeo* line of policy pursued in the name of the Minister entrusted with the seals of the Colonial Office in all questions purely local and domestic has only served to irritate and disgust the persons who are now qualified to vote in the elections for Members of Council, and I do not hesitate in foreseeing that with the maintenance of the present colonial policy, any material increase in the number of electors would only cause greater discontent. A legislative Council has been accorded to us, presided over by H.M's. Representative; and if England really wishes to have her great traditions respected, if her sole aim is to make this population happy and prosperous, she should once for all abandon the dictatorship which she has at an evil moment assumed.

The next point to which I desire to draw attention is the statement made by Mr. Ashley that all efforts at reforms had been thwarted by the Council. The Elected Members have been taxed with dereliction of duty in offering opposition to a proposal for a remission of half the duty at present levied on wheat. That the Elected Members supported by the whole population did offer opposition to this proposal is an admitted fact; but the grounds of such opposition remain, up to this moment, unrefuted by even the staunchest supporters of Free Trade. Mr. Ashley has confessed that Malta is a very peculiar place; and it is exactly because this peculiarity is realized to its fullest extent by the Elected Members of Council and the whole Community, that they consider the bread tax justifiable by the exceptional circumstances of the Island and by the peculiar political system we psosses. I am aware that a tax on bread is one which for many reasons is strongly objected to by the British Government. I know that it is antagonistic to the principles of Free

Trade. But this is a practical question and should be treated from a practical point of view. Possibly the few persons in Malta who have raised their voice against this tax did so more for showing that our fiscal arrangemenst are not in accordance with a particular theory of Government than through any formed conviction of any easy and satisfactory solution. The object of those who speak for the remission of this tax is no doubt intended to relieve the poorer classes who consume more bread than the richer classes. So far the object is a laudable one. But it has been proved times without number, and the evidence collected by Mr. Rowsell from various bodies bears me out in my assertion,that the generality of the population is opposed to any change in the system, for the simple reason that for the remission of wheat duty the Government must necessarily find other sources to give an equivalent sum now yielded by the bread tax, and the reduction in the price of bread would be extremely problematic, owing to the monopoly existing among bakers and breadsellers. It may be said that there is nothing to prevent the distruction of this monopoly by the legitimate weapon of competition. My own opinion is that the peculiarities of the place, strange though they be, do not warrant us to anticipate the extinction of this monopoly; and I can adduce no weightier proof to my argument than that the price of wheat having been often reduced to a rate sufficiently low to justify bakers selling their bread at 2d. or 2½d. per rotolo, the consumers gained nothing, as the bread was kept up at its original price of 3d. per rotolo.

Mr. Rowsell himself was so fully alive to this state of uncertainty that he hinted at the establishment of a *meta*, and even suggested as a possibility of breaking the monopoly, the making and selling of bread for the people at the Army and Naval Bakeries. These proposals I imagine, are as obnoxious to the principles of English trade as the bread tax itself, and emanating as they did from

a gentleman with free trade principles, clearly convince me that Mr. Rowsell, in recommending the abolition of that tax, was not very sanguine as to its beneficial results in favor of the poorer classes. The opposition therefore of the Elected Members to Sir M. Hicks Beach's proposal for the remission of half the duty on wheat was, I think, perfectly jutifiable as the Hon. Baronet omitted to signify his consent to the adoption of Mr. Rowsell's suggestion, and so long as it cannot be laid down with certainty that the abolition of that tax would give cheaper bread to the poor either by breaking the existing monopoly or by divising other means, it will be difficult to find persons with a knowledge of Malta and a sense of responsability to express their concurrence to a proposal which has no other merit than that perhaps of being consonant with a theoretical principle.

I shall proceed now to offer my defence to the charge which has been brought against me in common with my colleagues of having resisted all attempts towards the encouragement of the English Language. This is far from being the correct state of the case. What I stated in my report to Mr. Keenan, what I said in the Council, and what I still maintain is that all attempts to coercion in this respect should be particulary avoided. The English Language would soon make rapid strides if the advantages to be derived from a knowledge of it were made more apparent than they unfortunately are. The local Government, at the request of the Council, as a first step towards the diffusion of the English language repeatedly asked the Home Authorities to cause examination papers for entry into the Army, Navy and other Government situations to be sent out to Malta periodically where, under proper regulation, the Maltese youths could be made to compete at such examinations without incurring the expense of a voyage to England without perhaps a satisfactory result. This indulgence had it been allowed would have been, I am convinced, of the greatest service

for the diffusion of the English language. But it is painful to observe that after three years of unsuccessful trials in this direction by the local Authorities, we should now he told that H. M's. Government refused to grant us this reasonable request. On this very vital point Mr. Anderson is entirely silent, giving another proof that he has been made very imperfectly acquainted with the real wants of this population. There is only one way in which the diffusion of the English language in Malta may, in my opinion, he secured, and that is the prospect of lucrative employment in any branch of H. M's. Service by a thorough knowledge of English. As matters now stand, the knowledge of the English language appears not only unnecessary to young Maltese, owing to the total absence of situations under the Government; but its study to the partial exclusion of the Italian and French languages, which now give honorable employment to thousands of Maltese on the coast of Barbary and in the mighbouring Peninsula, is positively hurtful. Of course this state of things may be considerably modified if the object of the British Government in wishing to encourage the English language be that of enabling the Maltese to take their proper place as subjects. So far this place has not been taken, nor has it even been reached by those who, by proficiency in the English language coupled with general intelligence, have been able to find employment in the Military and Naval Departments of this Island. But I shall not dwell any longer on this point, and while thanking you and the British public for having listened patiently to the grievances of the Maltese, I can only assure them that this population would only be too happy to see the affairs of Malta discussed in the House of Commons, provided such discussion were based on trustworthy information.

Before concluding I must say one word in regard to the reply given by the Under Secretary to Mr. Anderson's speech. I shall not enter into any argument nor contradict

the gratuitousness of Mr. Ashley's assertion that there is at Malta a large and ignorant population governed by a small class naturally indisposed to reform; but I shall limit myself to one point and that is that Mr. Ashley's statements are far from being correct. He speaks of establishments abolished, when they are in full activity; he speaks of material changes introduced in others, where no change in those departments has ever been made; and he actually gives the name of Dr. Caruana as holding the office of P rincipal and Secretary in the University, where that learned gentleman's appointment to the Public Library has been in force for over two years.

I am,
Sir,
Yours obediently

Dr. Agostino Naudi
An Elected Member of the
Council of Government.
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