

A TRILOGY IN THE HISTORY OF MALTESE DENTISTRY

Tradition — Empiricism — Specialisation

PAUL CASSAR

S.B.St. J., M.D., B.Sc., D.P.M., F.R.Hist.S.

*Hon. Fellow of the
Royal University of Malta
Consultant Psychiatrist
Health Department
1961 Teacher in Clinical Psychiatry
Royal University of Malta*

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One of the remarkable features of the history of Maltese Dentistry is the rapid progress that the profession has made within the very short span of its existence as a scientific discipline. I think that the best way to give an idea of this progress from the very lowly beginnings is to focus your attention — in the time allotted to this address — on three main signposts on the road of its evolution, i.e. the phase of tradition, the stage of empiricism and the climax of specialisation.

Tradition

In the not too distant past, the normal process of the cutting of teeth in infants was blamed for quite a number of ailments both in popular belief and in medical circles. These alleged disturbances ranged from itching of the gums and fits of screaming to skin eruptions and convulsions.

The age of six months, which coincides with the time of the appearance of the first teeth, was conceived as being a critical hurdle in the infant's life and a very trying period for his parents. To cut short this stage of development as much as possible and to relieve the parents' anxiety, Maltese countryfolk resorted, as

late as the mid-eighteenth century, to the employment of charms in the belief that these amulets brought their supposed potency to bear on the infant's teeth by promoting dentition without trouble. These amulets consisted in small fossil shark's teeth which the parents suspended from their children's necks ⁽¹⁾. This belief may have originated from two sources: (a) either from the primitive idea that objects that resembled one another or looked alike functioned alike, so that the strong shark's teeth imparted to the infant the same strength to acquire his new dentition; or else (b) from the legend that these triangular teeth of the shark, which are found embedded in some of our rocks, were actually the petrified tongue of the Apostle St. Paul who during his stay in Malta in A.D. 60 preached Christianity so fervently to the Maltese that his words (symbolised by the tongue-shaped teeth) penetrated even the hard rock of our Islands.

It is worth noting that a similar custom prevails in Calabria, Italy, where children are made to wear necklaces of pierced animal teeth with the idea of preventing complications during teething ⁽²⁾.

Members of the medical profession were no less concerned about the dangers ascribed to teething. This had been the universally accepted medical thinking since the time of Hippocrates (460-355 B.C.). About one hundred years ago the Maltese physician Dr. Gavino

Gulia, in an annotation in the local medical periodical *Il Barth* (20th April 1872, p. 142) referred to a form of spinal palsy in infants "occurring during the period of dentition" for which he advocated "the facilitation of the eruption of the teeth". He gives no indication as to how this "facilitation" was to be effected but most probably he had in mind the scarification or lancing of the gums — a procedure already mentioned by Pliny the Elder (23-79 A.D.) in the first century of our era, popularised by Ambroise Pare' (1510-90) in the sixteenth century century, recommended by the Father of English Surgery John Hunter (1728-93) in the eighteenth and condemned only as recently as 1963 in America (3).

In 1884 another Maltese physician, Dr. Fabriz Borg, in a booklet dealing with the upbringing of babies, attributed the appearance of a papular rash behind the ears of infants to dentition and suggested the local application of almond oil as a remedial measure.

For the relief of the itching of the gums — which is thought to accompany the cutting of teeth — mothers supplied their children with the so-called teething-ring, a custom dating back to early Egyptian times. The ring was made of ivory or gum elastic and the infant was encouraged to bite it. Sometimes the mother herself rubbed the gums of her infant with the ring to pacify him. The use of this device was widespread during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Malta and it was still commonly seen up to thirty years ago hanging on a silver chain or cord round the necks of infants together with those other comforters — the dummy or teat and the rattle.

Dr. Fabriz Borg preferred to allow the infant to use his own fingers for the relief of the alleged itching rather than the ring because the fingers were softer and there was no danger of suffocation as might happen with a ring if swallowed. Of course this method had the disadvantage that finger-sucking would become a habit but Dr. Borg had a remedy for that — he suggested smearing the fingers with the bitter juice obtained from the cut leaves of our native plant *Aloe vera* (in

Maltese *Zabbara*) to discourage the infant from continuing to place his fingers in his mouth (4).

Teething, apart from being an alleged cause of morbidity, was also regarded as a serious threat to life. Our infant mortality rate is today (1969) 23 per 1000 live births (5) but up to 1939 it was one of the highest in the world averaging 250 per 1000 live births (6). The greatest killer was enteritis. This disorder was, in the words of the Chief Police Physician of a century ago, "particularly common among children during teething". The implication is obvious but in an official report about the mortality of the Maltese Islands in 1874, he was quite explicit when he listed teething as a cause of death among children under five years of age; in fact teething appears among other causes of mortality in children under the main heading of Developmental Diseases. To teething were ascribed 192 fatalities i.e. 4% of the total number of deaths in that year (7). The same notion was current in the United Kingdom where, in 1897, 5% of deaths were attributed to teething (8).

The conviction that difficult teething killed off many of our children was so ingrained in the mind of our ancestors that they have coined the proverb:

Ghan-nejbiet lesti l-kefniet

which means

With the cutting of the first teeth
prepare the shroud (9).

It is of interest to note that the same idea underlies an almost identical Spanish proverb which states that when the child cuts its teeth, death is on the watch (10).

Teething does not appear as a cause of infant deaths in official statistics in Malta at the beginning of the present century (11) but Maltese medical practitioners still blamed it for various ailments among infants. Dr. Roger Busuttil, later Professor of Anatomy at our University, took his colleagues to task in 1906 for resorting to this "frequently unjustified though handy diagnosis" and stressed the need for an adequate appreciation of the real aetiological factors underlying the infant's illness especially if it was of an enteric nature. He remarked that the be-

lief in teething as a cause of death was deeply rooted among the uneducated sections of society and that this prejudice was responsible for much of the mortality amongst children because by focussing attention on dentition it made them disregard the great importance of a faulty diet and of intestinal infection as the real killers of their offspring (12). It must be pointed out that the same prejudice prevailed abroad where it represented the standard medical thinking not only at the time but even much later; indeed the British text-book on the diseases of children which we read as medical students thirty years ago did not exclude teething as a possible cause of bronchitis, convulsions and fever among infants (13). It is not surprising, therefore, that these ideas should linger in the popular mind for many years afterwards. Thus as recently as 1956 a Maltese paediatrician was deploing the fact that teething was blamed for almost any ailment and that the mother used to show the doctor what stage teeth eruption had reached by running her dirty fingers across the baby's gums (14).

Empiricism

The earliest known publication on dentistry by a medical man from Malta belongs to 1636. In that year a Dr. Joseph Cossaeus, Master of Arts and Licentiate in Medicine, chose as one of his subjects for the doctorate thesis at the University of Montpellier the treatment of dental pain (15). He recommends section of the nerve "which runs to the teeth through the auditory meatus". The cut was to be made by a scalpel in the "internal and lower part of the ear". Absence of bleeding and rapid healing of the operation wound were among the advantages claimed for this procedure.

In this short work, dedicated to the Grand Master of the Order of St. John, Jean Paul Lascaris, Cossaeus calls himself *Melitensis* but there are doubts whether he was actually a native of our Island; most probably he described himself so because he might have held an appointment in the medical service of the Order of St. John which was also known as the

Order of Malta; however that may have been, the Cossaeus family had become extinct in Malta by the mid-eighteenth century (16).

In spite of this isolated instance of academic interest in dentistry in the seventeenth century, its practice at that time — and for many years after — was entirely empirical. Extractions and other dental treatments were carried out by surgeons, barber-surgeons and barbers so that dentists as a separate group did not exist.

With the advent of the eighteenth century we come across the first dental practitioners known to us by name in Malta. Almost all of them bear Italian surnames and the little we know about them is derived from the handbills which they distributed or from the scant personal data contained in their applications to the Grand Master of the Order of St. John for the granting of permission to exercise their "art" — as they called it — in Malta.

In December 1733 Gio Batta Grimaldi Francolino, described as being Maltese and who had left the Island in his early years, returned to Malta to practice the "art" of tooth-extractor (*cavadenti*) (17). In November 1730 he was in Vienna where he was granted the "privilegium" by Emperor Charles VI to practice dentistry for six years in the Imperial provinces. In his petition to the Emperor, Grimaldi stated that he had gone to Vienna from Malta, studied at the Academy of Padua, served as a dentist in the Courts at Polonia and at Saxonia, at the Court of Duke Leopold of Lorraine and at Mainz, the seat of the Elector Lothar Franz von Schönborn. He had also practiced for six months in Venice and had received pensions from some German princes. It is not known how long he stayed in Vienna, or when and where he died (18). A contemporary illustration portrays him in a medallion with an imaginary view of Malta in the background. In the centre there is a medicine and instrument case and on each side of it is a folded manuscript with a seal, one inscribed Duke of Wolfenbüttel 1721 and the other, Duke of Lorraine 1725 (19).

The Venetian surgeon Pietro Siveri came to Malta in 1760 and notified the public that he was prepared to extract

teeth at his residence. In a leaflet published from the Malta Government printing press — which was the only printing establishment then in Malta — he also advertised a Greek Balsam which he recommended for the most diverse diseases ranging from headache to wounds, ulcers and worm infestation in children. He also offered for sale an electuary or theriac which was efficacious against poisons, contagions and “all corruptions of the humours of the body” (20).

Another handbill was issued from the same press to advertise a “Cephalic Tincture” prepared by the Italian Royal Dentist Giovanni Ornieri who claimed that his tincture, when instilled in the nose, cured deafness, cataract and toothache. This was in 1765 (21).

The year is important because Ornieri was the first practitioner in Malta to style himself a “dentist”. The next man to use the same designation and to refer to his practice as a “profession” was a certain Mauro Gurrini from Bologna who applied for and was granted permission “to exercise and advertise his art” in Malta in June 1772. In his application he claimed that he had exercised his profession in “all the Courts and principal cities” through which he passed and that he was capable of treating all the diseases of the mouth, to clean and pull out teeth and fix artificial ones (22).

The first official mention of the post of dentist in the state medical service occurs in a payroll of the Holy Infirmary at Valletta in 1777 but it is probable that this post had been established at an earlier date. The holder was the barber-surgeon (*Barberotto*) Pietro Rancati who was the least paid member on the medical and surgical staffs of the hospital. In 1795 the post was filled by a certain Carlo Grech who is the first undoubtedly Maltese dentist known to us (23).

We are not aware of the kind of academic training that Carlo Grech may have received in dentistry but we know that at least three publications on this subject were available in Malta in his time (Royal Malta Library):

(a) *Le chirurgien dentiste ou traites'*

des dents by Pierre Fauchard (1678-1761) who laid the foundation of modern dentistry (Paris 1746, 2 vols, Second edition).

(b) *Soins faciles pour le propriété de la bouche et pour la conservation de dents* published by an anonymous *Chirurgien Dentiste du Roi* in Paris in 1757 ;and

(c) *De' morbi de' denti e delle gengie* by G. J. Planck, Professor of Surgery of the University of Buda (Venice, 1781).

These texts deal with the causes of the diseases of teeth and gums, their pathology and their remedial and preventive treatment. The filling of teeth with lead and gold and the provision of artificial dentures are also dealt with especially by Fauchard.

In 1779 we hear of another self-styled dentist — Pasquale Almirante — who was also a “botanist” and the *impresario* of the Manoel Theatre (24).

Towards the end of the century a Neapolitan, Gregorio Magrin, had for many years been living in Malta as a galley-slave and had carried on the trade of barber and tooth extractor. His condemnation to the galleys, however, had prevented him from devoting himself entirely to his dental pursuits for which, “thanks to his ability, he was much in demand”. He, therefore, petitioned the Grand Master in December 1795 to free him from the galleys to enable him to earn his living by the exercise of his art. He promised to continue to reside in Malta and his request was granted (25).

This motley group of dental practitioners was succeeded by a better type in the nineteenth century when the Maltese Islands became a British possession and saw many important social, political and medical changes. Dentistry, however, did not alter its pattern in so far as advertising was concerned. The only difference from former times was that instead of distributing handbills, the practitioner availed himself of a new method of publicity, i.e. the newspaper which made its appearance in Malta in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Here is an example of the

advertising methods of the time reproduced *verbatim* from *The Malta Government Gazette* of the 31st May 1837 (p.199):

"Mr. Antoine Isouard, Surgeon dentist, having practised for upwards of twenty years his important profession, in the principal cities of France, Holland and Italy, has just returned, with the highest and most flattering recommendations, to Malta where he solicits the patronage of the inhabitants during his short stay among them. His long and successful practice has rendered him fully acquainted with all the diseases incidental to the teeth and with the safest and most efficacious remedies to be applied to them.

All persons honouring him with their confidence may rely on a speedy and certain cure.

He constructs entire sets of teeth with the most happy success. By a new process he sets in artificial teeth so as to make it impossible to distinguish them from natural ones, and he corrects without causing any pain, the imperfections of children.

In the drawing, cleansing and preserving of teeth, and the preventing the further decay of those already attacked, the Surgeon's long experience will ensure those who apply to him of being carefully and skilfully attended to.

Antiscorbutic elixirs to cleanse, strengthen and protect the teeth from injury, and dentifrice powders may be had at his house. Mr. Isouard is at present in quarantine but will be in free pratique on the 5th June". He was still at Valletta at the beginning of August (26).

In the following month, there appeared another press notice, this time from a Maltese physician, which stated: "Charles Casolani, Doctor of Medicine, having pursued a course of studies and lectures in Naples, is lately returned to Malta and will henceforth practice as a physician. Dr. Charles Casolani has particularly applied himself to the study of the teeth and practised in Naples duly authorised as a Surgeon Dentist with success (27).

Dr. Casolani (1815-1898) represented the third generation of the Casolani fam-

ily which originally came to Malta from Bologna in 1777. After qualifying in medicine he spent some time exercising his profession in Turkey. A seal cut in hard stone shows his name in Turkish script — "Casolani the doctor" — and is still in possession of his descendants (28).

In later years Casolani turned his attention away from dentistry and launched out in an entirely different direction by devoting his energies to advocating much needed reforms in public sanitation and agitating for the political rights of the Maltese (29).

Among the early English Surgeon Dentists to practice in Malta was Dr. David Finnie who visited the Island in September 1838 and stayed at a hotel in Kingsway, Valletta, where he held consultations (30). He was again advertising his services in March 1848 (31). He died of typhus in Alexandria, Egypt, on the 27th October 1850 (32). The following year his son, J. Finnie, who was also a dentist, came to Malta and was available daily for consultations at the Circulating Library of Mr. G. Muir, in South Street, Valletta (33).

In April 1839 we hear for the first time of dentures being fitted with springs in Malta. A French dentist from Paris — named Poiron — stayed for a short spell in the Island. Besides performing "every operation belonging to his art", he made sets of teeth which he fitted "with the greatest precision with springs without the help of any ligature" (34). It is of interest to note that the spring retention of false dentures had come into use in the 18th century and George Washington wore one of them (35).

In September 1841 a surgeon dentist from London — Mr. W. Sparkes — was practising from No. 40 Zachary Street, Valletta. His fees, as stated in his advertisement, were: one dollar for scaling the teeth, two to three dollars for each tooth extracted in adults and half a dollar for drawing children's teeth. The "dollar" was known as the "current" or "Spanish dollar" and was equivalent to about four shillings and four pence (4/4d) (36). The name of Mr. Sparkes stands out boldly in the story of Maltese dentistry for he

was extracting teeth under ether anaesthesia in early January 1848. This is a significant landmark for you will recall that ether was first used in dentistry by Dr. William T. G. Morton in Boston on the 30th September 1846, i.e. only fifteen months before (37). Mr. Sparkes left the Island in November 1848 (38).

A release in a local newspaper of November 1845 informed the public that the dentist Antonio Borsini from Rome was scaling teeth and manufacturing artificial dentures at Valletta (92 Old Mint Street). He claimed to be a pupil "of the celebrated Langé of the Parisian school" and that he was "accurately versed in the jeweller's art" which he had learned in Geneva and "therefore works with his own hands whatever was necessary in gold" so as to fix artificial teeth firmly in the mouth. But Borsini was not merely a dentist and a goldsmith; he was also a chiropodist operating in everything relating to the cure and extraction of corns, bunions, defective nails, etc. (39).

In 1850 two surgeon dentists from London, Messrs Cohen and Rogers, advertised the fitting of dentures without springs and wires (40). Most probably they were using plates retained in place by atmospheric pressure — a type of denture introduced early in the nineteenth century in the United States of America by James Gardette and J. P. Scott (1831) (41). Thus the year 1850 marks the eclipse of dental springs in Malta.

The next progressive step in the manufacture of dentures was introduced in Malta by the Maltese dentist Alexander Preziosi in January 1860. This was the use of "vulcanite" in place of gold and platinum plates. He preferred this hard rubber product because it was lighter, more durable and easily adapted to the shape of the gums. His office was at 69, Merchants Street, Valletta (42). "Vulcanite" had been patented in America in 1851 and made use of for teeth attachments in 1859 (43).

Exactly one hundred years ago the first lady dentist — accompanied by her husband who also belonged to the profession — came to our shores. They were a French couple — Mr. and Mrs. Forniér —

who called themselves "medical dentists". Mrs. Forniér claimed to have "been honoured with the degree of Doctor by the Academy of Medicine at Paris and by the University of Naples and approved also by the local authorities". She was prepared to pay domiciliary calls "for the treatment of the teeth of Ladies and Children" (44).

Up to 1885 the Public Health Laws of the Maltese Islands were administered by the Police. The first legislative measure for the state control of dental practice and for the protection of the public from incompetent practitioners was taken in 1883. The Police Laws enacted in that year prohibited the practice of "the profession of... Surgeon-dentist" without a licence from the Head of Government (45). You may recall that the state regulation of dentistry in Great Britain had only come into effect five years previously through the passing of the Dental Act of 1878; so that Malta was not lagging far behind what had become the mother-country.

Specialisation

Although the Police Laws of 1883 pointed to a change of outlook with regard to dental practice, the standard of dentistry at the beginning of the present century was far from satisfactory; so much so that the Chief Government Medical Officer had often reported on the lack of proficiency of some dental practitioners (46). It was only in 1901 that Ordinances VII and XVII enforced the production of a certificate from the Medical Board showing that the applicant had obtained a diploma from the University or other specially authorised school in Malta. Those persons, however, who had been allowed to practice dentistry under the provision of an Act of the Imperial Government were exempted from this condition (47).

Basic conditions for regular training in dental surgery first appeared in 1907 when the requirements for the granting of the Diploma in Dental Surgery by our University were laid down by the Statute of that year (Section 237) (48). The candidate sitting for the examination had to

produce certificates showing that he had pursued his studies in dentistry in a recognised institution abroad; had been engaged for four years in professional studies; and had received three years instruction in mechanical dentistry from a recognised practitioner or at a dental hospital. These conditions were confirmed by Article 381 of the statute of 1915 (49). The first candidate to satisfy these requirements and to obtain the Diploma of Dental Surgery from our University was a certain John Eskdale Fishburn in 1918. Between the 7th and 11th November of that year he was examined in Dental Surgery, Pathology and Diseases of the Mouth; Dental Anatomy, Histology and Physiology; Dental Mechanics and Metallurgy. He also underwent a practical and an oral test lasting one hour and was "unanimously approved" (50).

The University remained a mere examining body in the field of dentistry until 1921 when measures were taken to establish a course of studies for the Diploma of Dental Surgeon. It was officially known as the Special Course of Dental Surgery and formed part of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery. It was open to students in possession of the matriculation of the University or an equivalent examination and the diploma was awarded to candidates who, besides passing examinations in the subjects listed in the Statute, submitted proof that they had spent at least five years in the practice of dental surgery at a teaching school or under a teacher approved by the General Council of the University (51). Most of the subjects were taught by the Professors of the Course of Science and of the Course of Medicine and Surgery either in the ordinary classes for Science and Medicine students or else in special classes held separately for dental students.

A step forward was the appointment of a Surgeon Dentist on the Staff of the Central Hospital at Floriana during the financial year 1922-23 and the establishment of a Dental Clinic at the same hospital which made it possible for students to receive practical instruction without the need of being apprenticed to a private dental surgeon.

While the subjects of the course had been prescribed by Article 22 of the Regulations of 1921, no syllabus had been laid down. The matter was deliberated at a meeting of the Special Council of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery on the 2nd August 1926 when Prof. Peter Paul Debono, Professor of Surgery, pointed out the expediency of establishing a School of Dentistry in our University. At its sitting of the 24th September, the Special Council resolved that a special teacher be appointed to teach special dental subjects and that he be styled Lecturer in Dentistry.

The topic again came up for discussion in November when a question was asked in Parliament as to whether a Course of Dentistry existed at our University. The Minister of Public Instruction requested the Rector of the University to submit a scheme "financial and otherwise" for the establishment of a Course of Dental Surgery. At a meeting of the Special Council of the Faculty a sub-committee was formed to devise a plan in terms of the Minister's request. Nothing, however, seems to have been done and the matter was allowed to lapse until 1930 when at its sitting of the 17th June the Special Council again appointed another sub-committee to draw up the syllabus within a month's time. The sub-committee submitted its report at the meeting of the 11th December 1930 but the Faculty "decided that the matter be postponed for further consideration". The syllabus was still being debated by the Faculty as late as the 15th May 1931.

Besides this inaction on the part of the Faculty, another hurdle had been impeding progress. The "special teacher" envisaged by the Special Council in September 1926 was simply not available in Malta as none of the dental practitioners then in the Island possessed the necessary qualifications. It was only in June 1930 that a dental surgeon (Mr. Petty) was considered by the Council to possess the necessary requirements to impart instruction in dentistry; but, even so, he was only "recognised in so far as the practical side of dentistry only, i.e. Practical Den-

tal Surgery, Practical Dental Prosthetics and Orthodontics”.

The Faculty again reiterated the need for a Lecturer in Dentistry at its sitting of the 33rd December 1930 when Professor Peter Paul Debono, seconded by Professor A. V. Bernard, proposed the following resolution which was unanimously approved: “It is the opinion of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery that if a Course of Dentistry is to be started in the University, a qualified Lecturer in Dentistry should be appointed and that such teacher should be provided by the Government with the necessary Clinic and Laboratory for the proper teaching, theoretical and practical, of the students” (52).

In fact it was not until 1933 that the first *ad hoc* lecturer in dental subjects was appointed. This was Egidio Lapira who had started his training with Lieut. A. B. Willis Rust, the first Army Dental Surgeon to come to Malta during World War I. Mr. Lapira was the first Maltese candidate — and the second diplomate — to qualify in dentistry from our University in 1922. He later occupied the Chair of Dental Surgery when this was set up in 1943 (53).

In 1935 the students of the Special Course of Dentistry applied to the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery to be granted a degree instead of a diploma in dentistry. The matter was discussed at a meeting of the Faculty on the 28th March but no decision was arrived at. The question was again brought to the fore by the dental students a year later and at its meeting of the 12th November 1936 the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery appointed a sub-committee to study the issue. This sub-committee reported favourably on the 3rd December and proposed the granting of a Degree of Bachelor of Dental Surgery (B.Ch.D.) to persons already in possession of the Diploma in Dentistry of the University of Malta provided that the candidate had attended at least one year's practice in a dental clinic recognised by the University, submitted a written thesis on a dental subject to the satisfaction of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery and underwent an oral examination of not less than forty-five minutes on the above the-

sis. These proposals were approved by the Faculty but the Degree of Bachelor of Dental Surgery was not introduced until 1943 (54) when the programme of studies was revised and extended over a period of four years. In the meanwhile, in July 1936, the Diploma of Dental Surgery obtained the recognition of the General Medical Council of the United Kingdom as entitling its holders to register without examination in the United Kingdom as Colonial Dentists in the Dentists' Register (55).

A change of designation from Lecturer to Professor took place in 1943. A further reform in the programme of studies was effected in 1947 when the Diploma in Dental Surgery was abolished and the duration of the course leading to the Bachelorship was increased to six years (56).

The first move to render the Special Course of Dentistry independent of the Course of Medicine and Surgery was made on the 10th October 1932 by Professor A. V. Bernard, Professor of Hygiene, but no conclusion was arrived at on his proposal. The question was again mooted at the sitting of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of the 21st February 1938 when the proposal of constituting a Board of Dentistry, separate from the Special Council of Medicine and Surgery, was placed on the agenda. Professor A. V. Bernard, however, was prepared to go even further and, prompted by the same forward-looking vision of previous years, he proposed the erection not of a Board but of a Faculty of Dentistry. He was seconded by Professor Luigi Preziosi who held the Chair of Ophthalmology (57). It is to the great credit of Professor A. V. Bernard and his supporter Professor Luigi Preziosi that these far-sighted pathfinders recognised, at a relatively early date, the need for the separation of dentistry from the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery and for setting it on an independent course of development. However, in spite of these initial efforts, matters remained in abeyance until, in later years, the question was revived by Professor Lapira who, in the meantime, had been elected, *Honoris Causa*, Fellow of the Royal College of

Surgeons of England (1948) and Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh (1951). His endeavours to raise the status of dental education and training were finally crowned with success in 1954 with the establishment of the Faculty of Dentistry at our University. In recognition of his services the degree of Doctor of Science (*Honoris Causa*) was conferred upon him in the same year by the University (58).

There is another man we must remember with gratitude on this occasion — Professor Lapira's immediate successor in the Chair — Professor J. J. Mangion who was the first Maltese Dental Surgeon to gain the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England by examination (1948) and who continued to guide Maltese dentistry in its years of growth and who has shown what notable results can be obtained by a well organised hospital department and co-ordinated team work in dental treatment.

Thanks to these pioneers Maltese dentistry has been uplifted within living memory, from the level of an advertising craft to the summit of a speciality on a par with other specialities of the medical and surgical professions; based on a sound scientific university education, regulated by an ethical code, controlled by a statutory register, honoured by the recognition of its university degree on the part of Great Britain and acclaimed by the dental brotherhood in the international field.

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