

MALTA, FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE AND THE CRIMEAN WAR

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When the French steamer 'Osiris' entered Malta's harbour on April 7, 1854, it was soon rumoured that she had brought with her "news of the most exciting interest — War has been declared." (1) The news referred to the opening of hostilities between the Allied Forces (Britain, France, Piedmont and Turkey) and Russia. This war has gone down in European history as the Crimean war. For the next year or so the expedition to the Crimea was "the all-absorbing topic in Malta, as everywhere else." (2) The anxiety which prevailed in Malta "for the arrival of advices from the seat of war in the Crimea, is most intense." (3)

Russia's demand of the right of protection over all Greek Christians living in the Turkish Empire was asserted by Turkey to be a direct interference by the former in her internal affairs. Britain, France and Piedmont soon came to the support of the Turks, and so the first great European war since the fall of Napoleon began. (4)

The war was given ample coverage in the local papers, more especially because the Island served as an important military station for the training of troops prior to their despatch to the front, as a supply depot of foodstuffs and ammunition, as a repairing yard, and as a base hospital.

No wonder it could be written that "since the arrival in Malta of the news of the declaration of war, the embarkation of troops has continued with unremitting assiduity, and the excitement produced in the Island is almost indescribable." — "The scene which occurred on the embarkation of the troops was singularly inspiring. In either harbour, crowds of people assembled — the crash of trumpets intoning the most popular and patriotic airs were almost drowned in the enthusiastic

cheers which rent the air — the leave taking by the officers and men, of their wives and families, forming a painful contrast to the joy which otherwise so generally pervaded. As the vessels moved slowly from their buoys dense masses of people lined the batteries, and yet more dense crowds of soldiers, the forts — those of St. Angelo and Ricasoli, in the Great Harbour — and those of Manoel and Tigne' in the quarantine, St. Angelo, (sic, an obvious error for St. Elmo) forming the central point between the two harbours, from which the soul stirring cheers arose. The most cordial shouts rent the air, as either vessels in either harbour moved along which had hardly faded into echo from one fort, ere they were taken up by the troops in the other, and as joyously responded to from on board. And yet the thousands of brave fellows, about to shed their blood on foreign shores, are ill provided with comfort, or in some instances with necessaries." (5)

The news reached Malta, on the very day that a parade of the whole expeditionary force was ordered at the Floriana Parade grounds. The parade was suddenly broken up, and orders almost immediately issued for the embarkation to the Crimea. In Malta at the time there were some 15,000 troops, belonging to the Companies of the various British regiments. There were hardly any ships to convey the troops, so that mail steamers arriving from India had to drop their passengers in Malta, and be employed instead for the service of the troops. Thousands of these gallant fellows had, indeed, taken "a last fond look of the valley, and the village church and the cottage near the brook."

Meanwhile naval and military movements on the Island continued to gather momentum. Thus, for instance, the P. & O.

steamship 'Simla', the second largest in the company after the 'Himalaya', arrived from Southampton with a number of staff officers and their horses — horses of the Royal Horse Artillery — and 1500 casks of provisions for the Black Sea Fleet. At the time, it was said that that was the largest stock that had ever been sent off at one despatch from any victualling yard in England. Whilst the war was raging more than one hundred thousand dozen oranges were ordered at Malta at one time for the sailors of the Black Sea Fleet. With regard to the continuous naval movements at Malta, one would mention particularly the giant screw ship 'Himalaya', which arrived from Gibraltar with some 500 mules on board en route for Constantinople and Balacava. Foreign ships calling at Malta, and carrying troops, officers and ammunition included French vessels from Marseilles and Toulon. All planks, scantling timber, carpenter's tools, and similar articles readily available on the Island were purchased by the Commissariat for conveyance to the East, these being required for the erection of huts for the troops in the Crimea. Simultaneously, the Commissariat in Malta notified that "that Depot was desirous of purchasing masons', carpenters', miners', and blacksmiths' tools, stoves, etc." Meanwhile, several steam vessels, laden with wooden huts, which were to shelter the troops from the cold of a Crimean winter, passed through Malta. At the naval dockyard in Malta, a number of shells were made; these were used in blowing up the Russian ships sunk at the mouth of the port of Sebastopol, the main seat of severe fighting. These shells, spherical in shape, varied in size containing from 250 to 1000 lbs of gunpowder. During the war vessels from the Crimea were sent to Malta for repairs at the naval yard. Barracks accommodation was available for thousands of "raw recruits" who were sent out from England to Malta "to be drilled in the necessary military exercises before joining the army in the Crimea." Transport vessels conveying hundreds of mules and muleteers — some having from Spain — passed through Malta. The Land Transport Corps on active service in the Crimea also included hundreds of Maltese engaged as

muleteers.

Local papers published regularly lists of those wounded or killed in action. The English Hospital at Scutari has since become famous. The rapid increase in number of wounded soldiers induced the authorities to seek medical help from Malta, and, following a request by the Admiral Superintendent, four young Maltese Doctors immediately offered their services. These were Dr. P. Grillet, Dr. A. Bellanti, Dr. A. Arpa and Dr. Vincenzo Muscat. They left Malta for the Crimea on Saturday May 14 1854, on board H.M. screw ship 'Algiers' (Capt. C. Talbot). Dr. F. Ellul, Assistant Surgeon of the Royal Malta Fencibles, who had volunteered for service in the East, also left Malta for the same destination on that same day on board the steam corvette 'Fury' (Com. E. Chambers); Dr. Ellul was subsequently appointed to the staff of the British Army. When the term of duty of these private doctors was completed, soon after their return to Malta, Dr. Grillet, Dr. Bellanti and Dr. Muscat were, early in May 1855, called upon by the Principal Medical Officer to give their services to the garrison without the city walls, as regimental surgeons. All three doctors accepted the post. When in September 1855, Dr. Bellanti resigned his post, Dr. George Cousin, another Maltese who was attached to the Military Medical Department was appointed in his place and took charge of the troops at Fort Ricasoli. Also at Scutari, there was yet another young Maltese doctor, who had distinguished himself so much as to win the appreciation of the celebrated Florence Nightingale. Miss Nightingale addressed a personal letter of thanks to Dr. Salvatore Luigi Pisani for his services in her hospital at Scutari, and she was "so greatly pleased with him" that she urged the military Authorities to secure his services as a military surgeon. In fact, soon after his return to Malta — he had left Scutari on sick leave — he was appointed Medical Officer to the garrison stationed at St. Julian's. However, he soon relinquished this post as he preferred to practise medicine with his father, himself a distinguished physician. Dr. Salvatore Luigi Pisani was the only son of Dr. Luigi Pisani, whose memorial is at the Mall in Floriana.

He studied medicine at the University in Malta, in Edinburgh and in Berlin. He practised the medical profession in London, Paris, Munich and Vienna. In Munich he became acquainted with hygiene and sanitation through his friend, Dr. Pettenkoffer. Meanwhile he became proficient in languages, getting to know German, French and Italian, besides English. He was appointed professor of Anatomy and Surgery at the Malta University and Chief Government Medical Officer. As the head of the medical profession in Malta, he was the acknowledged leading doctor of the Island. Dr. Pisani's merits were recognised beyond our shores. The dignity of Commander of the Order of St. Michael and

St. George (CMG) was conferred upon him by Her Majesty Queen Victoria. In his late years he suffered from loss of memory. He died at the venerable age of 80 years.

Another Maltese citizen who distinguished himself throughout the Crimean conflict was the Most Rev. Canon Paolo Le Brun. He was one of Malta's most eminent ecclesiastics and in his late years occupied the place of Treasurer of the Cathedral Chapter. This prelate, in his younger days, accompanied the English troops throughout the Crimean Campaign, his devotion and gallantry being especially mentioned in despatches, and earning promotions in rank and many honours granted in that protracted campaign. After his retirement

*The Noble F. V. Ingloffe - Malta
offered by a fellow worker
F. Nightingale.*

London Dec. 10/63

NOTES

ON

HOSPITALS.

BY

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

Third Edition,

Enlarged and for the most part Re-written.

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LONDON:

LONGMAN, GREEN, LONGMAN, ROBERTS, AND GREEN.

1863.

from the active list, with the honorary rank of Captain, he was popular in English and Maltese society. His piety, learning and kindness of heart elicited great admiration. He died aged 90 years.

In Malta it was learned from the English papers that public interest in the Metropolis in the care of the wounded in the English Hospital at Scutari had induced some philanthropic individuals to assist in providing nurses. Amongst these public spirited people, there was the benevolent Miss Florence Nightingale. She had engaged at her own expense, a number of female nurses — including Sisters of Mercy — and had undertaken to conduct a party of forty to Scutari. This initiative enjoyed the patronage of the Duke of Newcastle. The greater number of the members forming the party was selected from Miss Sellon's Establishment, Bishop's training hospital for nurses and the Roman Catholic Seminaries of Norwood and Bermondsey; all concerned were "acting from a religious sentiment of doing good to their fellow creatures." (6) Fifteen of them were paid nurses recruited from various hospitals. The whole party was under the direction and charge of Dr. Cumming and Dr. Spencer, Deputy Inspectors General of Hospitals, who were proceeding "under immediate orders" to the same destination. Florence Nightingale was accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. E. Bracebridge. A few months later Miss Stanley, daughter of the Bishop of Norwich, sailed from England with additional nurses to reinforce Miss Nightingale's contingent.

Florence Nightingale and her party left London on October 23, 1854, Traveling on the P. & O. steamer 'Vectis' (Capt. H.W. Powell) — especially hired by the British Government to convey them at once to Constantinople — they sailed from Marseilles on the 28th. of the same month, arriving in Malta two days later. O'Malley in his standard biography of Florence Nightingale describes the journey from Marseilles to Malta in the following terms:

"The 'Vectis' was a ship constructed entirely for carrying mails, and sailed for speed rather than comfort. Florence was almost immediately incapacitated by seasickness. She had settled the three parties

of nuns, sisters and nurses each in their separate quarters, and made them as comfortable as the very restricted space allowed. But she could do no more; when stormy weather began and they were all ill and many of them terribly frightened, only Mrs. Bracebridge, who was never seasick, could go round like a ministering angel. The discomforts of the voyage were indeed terrible. The three parties, forty women in all, were packed like sardines into the three divisions of the fore cabin. The little shelves in dark recesses on which they were expected to sleep were like coffins and full of hundreds of young cockroaches and other crawling creatures. Water came continually into the cabin, but no air. The Sisters perhaps suffered more than the nurses who were accustomed to slum conditions. "Oh for air, air!", cried one of them, who was very ill and in high fever. "What does the lady mean?" said a nurse who overheard her. "Who is Air? I never heard of him." (7)

During the few hours that the steamer was calling at Malta, the party came ashore. According to O'Malley: "At Malta, Mr. Bracebridge took all who were well enough ashore sight-seeing. Putting his ideas of discipline into force — 'Perhaps he learned them in the Militia' said one of the Sisters maliciously — he marched them through the street. Protestant Sisters first, Catholic nuns last, nurses in the middle where they could do no harm. In the Cathedral, Mass was being celebrated, the nuns began to fall out of their ranks and to sink upon their knees; he was much disconcerted and annoyed. The sun was blazing, the streets were insufferably hot, the glare from the sea and sky was blinding, and everybody was worn with sickness. On the whole therefore the Sisters were relieved when they got back to the ship." (8)

The party did not remain unnoticed, and all the local papers carried the news of Florence Nightingale's stop on the Island. According to the *Malta Times*: "The party landed and visited the objects in Valletta most worthy of notice, and in passing through the streets attracted the sympathy and admiration of the inhabitants, many of whom expressed themselves highly gratified

Luigi Pullicino and E. Nuzzo. A public subscription to meet the necessary expenses was started and within the next few days reached a total of £300.

The victory celebrations were staged in Valletta on the 28th and 29th September 1855. Whilst stressing the significance of that victory, in an editorial note, the *Portafoglio Maltese* commented in Italian: "Malta, as an important maritime station in the Mediterranean, gives praise to the Almighty who presides over the destiny of nations, because in a single day it has seen the destruction of a large and terrible enemy fleet, which threatened the liberties of the populations of the south of Europe. Two principles stand out in the great struggle in the East: the principle of freedom and of political and social emancipation represented by England and France and that of autocracy and servitude most prominently represented by Russia". A solemn funeral service in honour of those who died "in the cause of liberty and independence" was held at the Jesuits' Church by the rector of that church, the Rev. Canon Dr. Calcedonio Falzon. A select programme of sacred music was conducted by Mro. Vincenzo Bugeja. A symbolic catafalque was erected in the main nave of the church, with an inscription written by the well known Latinist and epigrammist, the Rev. Father Giuseppe Zammit (Brighella):

O Magnanimi Viri/Queis Patriae Virtutis Gloria/ Ipsa Vita Carior Fuit/Post Grande Proelium/Aeternae Palmam Victoriae/Donet Vobis in Coelo/Misericordiarum Pater/Christus.

The singing of the Hymn of Thanksgiving, the *Te Deum*, by the congregation brought the sacred function to its conclusion. Present at the ceremony were H.E. the Governor, Sir William Reid, civil and military authorities, foreign consuls and a large concourse of people. "There never was a more tender or more moving ceremony." (10)

On the facade of the church the following inscription, composed by the said Father Zammit, was erected:

Piis Manibus/Amisssorum Militum/Catholicum Nomen Profitentium/Qui Sub Validissimis Sebastopolis Moenibus/ Admi-

randa Virtute/Adversus Moschos Pugnantes/Magnae Animae Prodigii/Hostilibus Campis Occubuerunt/Cives Melitenses/Parentates/Novissima Amores Officia/Per solvunt.

The Royal Standard was hoisted on the Palace and the Palace Tower "was literally concealed under flags of all descriptions." — "Looking like a huge tent which was waving in the wind in the heart of the city." (11) Flags were flown on all the forts, public buildings and official residences of foreign consuls. Also the ships in harbour carried flags.

The main squares of the historic city of Valletta were profusely decorated which enhanced the atmosphere of jubilee. The facade of the Palace was festooned with garlands, and between the two main doors appeared "in large green letter the talismanic word **Sebastopol**." The coats-of-arms of France, England, Sardinia and Turkey embellished one side of the Palace Square. The fountains at each end of the Palace Square were surmounted by a painted decoration representing the flags of the four allied forces. Over the Main Guard a transparency was erected which depicted Queen Victoria, the French Emperor and the Turkish Sultan. The scene was prominently dominated by the names of Pelissier and of Simpson. Marshal A. Pelissier had been given the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath — G.C.B. by Queen Victoria and General James Simpson the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour by the French Emperor.

From Porta Reale (Kingsgate) down to the Palace Square, in the city's main street, Kingsway, the lamp-posts were decorated with banners and burners and balconies of private houses were covered with damask.

The decorations of the facade of the Public Library on the Treasury Square (now Queen's Square) attracted special attention. Here appeared the names of the heroes of the allied troops: Lyons, Bruat, Raglan, St. Arnaud, Omer Pasha, Carrobert, La Marmora.

E.C. Lyons, Rear Admiral Commander-in-Chief of Her Britannic Majesty's Naval Forces in the Black Sea, the son of Lord Lyons, had been fatally wounded in the night attack on Sebastopol; Bruat was

the Vice-Admiral Commander-in-Chief of the French Squadron in the Black Sea and French Marshal St. Arnaud commanded the expedition to the Crimea, whilst General de la Marmora was in command of the Sardinian troops. There were allegorical scenes of the towers of Malakoff and Redan, carrying the French and the English flag respectively. A Latin inscription by Father Zammit dominated the scene:

Tauride Expugnata/Hostium Classe
Deleta/Ingentem Victoriam/Salutant Populi.
"Il Mediterraneo", however, attributed the authorship of this distich to Dr. Nicholas Zammit, another scholar of the time, who was also a doctor of medicine and an architect.

On the Square in front of the Law Courts (Auberge d'Auvergne) a large pyramidal, gothic stand was erected and elaborately ornamented with hundreds of lamps.

In Strada Reale (Kingsway) the next point of attraction was the Auberge de Provence, which housed the Union Club. The columns of the main door were festooned with garlands. "Over the door and attached to the balcony were four knights in armour, bearing the flags of the allied powers. The three who bore those of France, England and Sardinia wore the Cross of Malta, on their shield; the one who carried the Turkish banner had also the Turkish emblem emblazoned on his shield, the Cross of Malta having been covered with a piece of red leather, on which was painted in white a half moon and star."⁽¹²⁾ From each window the historic edifice projected a white flag having the names inscribed in black letters: **Silistria, Alma, Inkerman, Oltenitza, Tchernaja, Sweaborg, Malakoff, Sebastopol.**

The celebrations included Royal Salutes from Fort St. Angelo, from St. James Cavalier, and from the Saluting Battery; this latter was furnished by a Company of the Maltese Militia under the command of Capt. Cav. Giacomo Tagliaferro. Horse races were held in the afternoon. In the evening a grand fire-works display took place outside Porta Reale. This was followed by a concert held on the Palace

Square. Singers and orchestra from the Opera Company, under the direction of Sig. G. Le Brun, sang and played a hymn arranged for the occasion by Mro. Domenico Amore; the hymn was a combination of 'God Save the Queen', 'Partant Pour La Syrie', a Turkish aria, a Sardinian tune and a popular song known as 'Cheer, boys, cheer, we're going to fight the Russians'. The concert went on almost till midnight, when the Band of the Royal Malta Fencibles under the direction of Captain Cav. G.P. De Marchesi Testaferrata Olivier wound up the festival with a selection of popular arias.

On the occasion of those celebrations the flags of the four allied powers were hoisted on the steeple of the Protestant Cathedral Church of St. Paul, whilst the Jewish Synagogue was brilliantly illuminated in the evening. The august event "*fausto avvenimento*" — was also marked in Malta by the distribution of a sonnet in Italian "*parto di una dotta persona maltese*" ("the brain child of a lerned Maltese".)

The Sultan of Turkey issued medals in gold and silver to commemorate the fall of Sebastopol; these were distributed to all the officers of the allied armies who had taken part in the siege. The medal showed the Imperial Sign with the word Sebastopol written in Turkish on the obverse; a wounded Russian Eagle, surmounted by the four Allied flags, a Cannon, a scroll map of the Crimea and the word Sebastopol in European letters. With the cessation of hostilities the troops began to return to Malta; others, including foreign troops, passed through Malta on their return journey home.

Since in this essay, I have mentioned Florence Nightingale's short visit to Malta, it may not be amiss to record yet another affectionate link that exists between this illustrious lady and the Island. I am referring particularly to her standard work entitled: "Notes on Hospitals", published in London in 1863, a copy of which, now at the Royal Malta Public Library, had been presented by the writer to the Hon. Sir Ferdinand Inglott, Comptroller of Charitable Institutions, with the following autograph dedication:

“The Honourable F.V. Inglott — Malta.
offered by a fellow-worker
F. Nightingale
London Dec. 10/63.”

No doubt, this book by so famous a personality is of special interest to the student of medical history in Malta, because it contains a set of plans on Malta showing, for instance, the proposed General Military Hospital in Valletta (Plan VII), the Asylum for the Aged and Infirm (Plan VIII), and Hospital for Incurables (Plan IX).

Besides, this book also contains long passages, even whole chapters on Improved Hospital Plans for Malta. Thus: “It is proposed to erect a general military hospital on the pavilion principle for 300 beds, with the pavilions differently arranged from any existing example The hospital will overlook the sea at a height of 170 feet above its level.” The site chosen for this hospital, which was never built, was enclosed by Strada Molini, Strada Genio, and Strada San Andrea and projected on to the bastion.

“Other two establishments are proposed to be erected by the enlightened local government of Malta. One of these is an asylum for 1000 aged and infirm persons, 500 of each sex Connected with this establishment, it is proposed to build a hospital for 300 beds The sanitary

details of both plans contain everything required for ensuring a healthy state of the buildings. They were prepared at the instance of the government of Malta, by Mr. T.H. Wyatt, and when completed, they will place this small island in the foremost rank as regards its charitable institutions.”

The autographed copy mentioned above, contains a marginal note in Sir Ferdinand's own handwriting stating: “The Block Plans and details of internal arrangements, were all given by me. Wyatt reduced the whole to ‘Architectural proportions’ and no more was done by him. Documentary proofs are in my possession, bearing the Governor's signature”.

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