

The Medical School of Malta.¹

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THE University of Malta was founded by the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. Before the Order of St. John settled in Malta, those who cared to give their children a higher education had to send them to schools in Sicily, for the island was then only the "Cità Notabile" of the Sicilian crown.

Thirty years after La Vallette had founded the city which bears his name, the Jesuit fathers, who had already Papal authority for teaching philosophy and theology, offered to build a college and a church in Valletta. Their offer was accepted, and on September 4, 1595, Grand Master Garzes laid the first stone of the building, which was completed in 1602. Twelve Jesuit fathers held public courses of philosophy and theology and trained young men for the priesthood. Degrees of Master of Philosophy and of Doctor of Divinity were conferred on the scholars after a searching examination, as testified by the elaborate diploma given at the time. In 1768, the Jesuits had to leave the island, and their colleges and all their property were, by Papal authority, transferred to the government of the Knights.

The Grand Master of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem (Fra Emmanuele Pinto) undertook to maintain the standard of studies laid by the Jesuits, and in 1769, with the consent of Pope Clement XIV, he founded the present University. The decree, solemnly published on November 22, 1769, begins as follows² :—

" We create from this date a public University of general studies, and grant to the said University, to its Directors, Lecturers, Teachers, and Pupils all the privileges, prerogatives, pre-eminences, graces and honours, which have been granted to other Universities, and it is our will that they should enjoy and use the same as if they were specially expressed therein.

" For the better management of the said college and University we hereby create a dignitary to be known as Protector, whom we shall in due time appoint

¹ At a meeting of the Section, held May 21, 1920.

² " Erectio Collegii et Universitatis studiorum Melitensis " (from the Liber Bullarum No. 253 in the Government Archives).

and who in our stead and under our orders shall have every right of superiority and direction, and we now invest him with the powers to confer the degree of Bachelor, Licentiate, Doctor and Master, conformably with and in pursuance of the laws and usages of other public Universities, on such as shall have pursued their studies during the prescribed period, and shall be of good conduct and shall have acquired a sufficient knowledge in the Faculties in which they seek a degree; and we direct that those who are approved in the various degrees shall enjoy all such pre-eminences, prerogatives, graces and honours as are enjoyed by graduates of other public Universities.”

In the Pope's brief concerning the University, no detailed list of subjects to be taught, except theology, was given, but it was stated simply “*aliasque ingenuas et liberas artes et facultates*,” and this, as the ambassador of the Grand Master explained in a special letter, in order that the Grand Master could add all the chairs and schools he thought proper. Four Papal briefs were granted in favour of the University, two of October 20, 1769 (*Solleciti non quidem*, and *Sedula Romani Pontificis*), and two of January 26, 1771 (*Dudum nos per alias* and *Maxima utilitatis*). The University flourished considerably under very able teachers, and diplomas of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Laws and Doctor of Divinity were granted.

The schools of pharmacy and of medicine were later additions to the Malta University, but special licences had formerly been granted under the authority of the Grand Masters of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem to young men trained in the hospitals and on the galleys of the order. The Faculty of Medicine of Malta is the direct outcome of the chivalrous Order of the Knights of St. John. The knights were mainly concerned with the treatment of the sick and wounded, for the order originated in the hospital wards of Jerusalem, where the soldiers who fought for the holy places found a bed to rest their weakened body and pious hands to treat their wounds. The pious monks, to whose care the sick were entrusted, had to treat them and at the same time to defend them from the attacks of the relentless foe, hence the double character of the members of the order as hospitallers and fighting knights. The order flourished, and their feats of arms became famous all the world over, but the care of the sick and wounded remained to the last their chief concern, and the hospital was always cared for more than any of the famous *auberges* of the seven languages.

The *motto* of the order might have been taken from what Grand Master Lastic said in 1445: “*Quæcunque nostra possidet religiosa*

congregatio, non *nostra*, sed pauperum sunt, debiliū ac infirmorum." The chief of the order was originally called the Grand Hospitaller, and when the title of the supreme ruler was changed into that of Grand Master, the chief dignity of the order remained that of the Grand Hospitaller, the Prior of the French Language.

The Holy Infirmary (*Sacra Infermeria*), as the main hospital was always designated, had special privileges, and when an inquisitor was appointed by the Holy See in Malta he was not allowed to have any jurisdiction over the hospital, although, at the time of Grand Master Perellos, this high dignitary of the Church was so powerful in the island as even to claim the privilege of stopping the Grand Master's coach to enable his own to cross the road. The French knights were so jealous of the privilege of being in charge of the hospital that no knight was allowed to enter without depositing the emblems of his dignity at the gate. Even the Grand Marshal of the order had to forgo his *bâton* of commandant when paying an official visit to the infirmary. Vertot relates¹ that some officials of the inquisitor once entered the hospital without permission and the Knight d'Avernes de Bocage, who was in charge, on being informed of the intrusion, had the officials turned out in a most unceremonious manner.

In the year 1777 there were employed in the great hospital of 745 beds six physicians and four assistants, six surgeons and six assistants, one apothecary and five assistants. As the medical staff of the great hospital and that of the fleet of galleys of the order had to be kept constantly at full strength, students were admitted, and, after a considerable number of years' training, they were granted a warrant to practise medicine and surgery.

Before the order established itself in Malta the Maltese obtained medical diplomas at Catania or Palermo. We find that in 1401 a Leone Maltese studied medicine at Catania, and was afterwards appointed physician to King Martin of Sicily. A Simeone Maltese practised in 1413, a Benedetto da Malta obtained a diploma at Palermo in 1445, and a Lia Sabat Maltese a diploma at Catania in 1484. We find noted that in 1539, nine years after the order had fixed their abode in Malta, the "Universita," or Municipality, paid twenty dollars (*oncie*) a year to two physicians and one dollar to a barber surgeon for blood letting (*per sangar los malos*).

It was in 1674 that special attention was paid to the medical studies

¹ Vertot, "Histoire de l'Ordre de Malte," liv, xiv, p. 226.

in the "Sacra Infermeria." The Grand Master Fra Nicholas Cotoner founded a school of botany, anatomy, medicine, and surgery, and entrusted its direction to a Doctor Giuseppe Zammit, who had instituted a botanical garden in a ditch of Fort St. Elmo, not far from the hospital of the order. The courses followed were both theoretical and practical, but dissection of the dead body was not allowed under Grand Master Cotoner. It was the next chief of the order, Fra Marc Antonio Zondadari, who directed that to help the study of anatomy post-mortem examinations should be undertaken in the hospital of the order. As the dissection of the human body was regarded askance by most of the people of the time, the order directed that the bodies of all professed knights, including the Knights Grand Cross, and of all those who died in a hospital, should be dissected by the master of anatomy.¹

As there was nobody in the island qualified to teach practical dissection, the council of the order selected the young surgeon Gabriele Henin to proceed to Florence at their expense to study anatomy at the Royal Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova. On his return to Malta Henin was appointed, by Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena, a public teacher in the hospital, where he lectured and gave practical demonstrations in human anatomy. In 1723 Henin gave lectures in Italian in anatomy, physiology and pathology, and acted as surgeon in the hospital.

A decree of the treasury² shows the rate at which surgeons were remunerated in these days:—

"In order to ensure," the decree says, "that the knowledge acquired in Florence by the surgeon Gabriele Henin, at the expense of the order, be used on behalf of the patients in our holy infirmary, we grant him a monthly salary of twelve scudi (one pound sterling) with the understanding that he will teach the young students practical anatomy and lithotomy and will do whatever may be assigned to him by the chief of the hospital and the other medical men in the service of the patients in the holy infirmary."

The young surgeon was granted later on ten scudi (about seventeen shillings) for every operation of lithotomy, and later he had an allowance of five scudi for every operation of cataract; in this case, however, it was expressly stated that the payment was to be made only if the operation was successful.³

¹ Professor Carlo Fedeli, "L'ordine di Malta e le Scienze Mediche," Pisa, 1918.

² "Libro decreti delle Vende Camra del Tesoro" *Archivio*, Vol. 648, fol. 345.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 649, fol. 173.

In 1740, the Maltese surgeon, Michel Angiolo Magri, one of the pupils of Henin, became a famous dissector in the Royal Hospital of Santa Maria Maggiore in Florence, where his angiological preparations in coloured wax were as much admired as those of the famous Ruysch. In 1748, Magri was appointed first Master of Anatomy in the Hospital of Messina.

At the death of Henin, the Maltese surgeon Enrico Maggi succeeded him as a teacher of anatomy, but owing to ill-health he had to give up teaching after a short time.

In the year 1754, the inquisitor in Malta, Monsignor Gregorio dei Duchi di Salviati, brought with him his private medical attendant, Vincenzo Galli, who during his stay in Malta lectured on anatomy with great success. In 1763 the treasury of the order appointed as anatomist in the Great Hospital the Maltese surgeon Michel Angiolo Grima, who lectured on anatomy and gave public demonstrations on the dead body. In 1765 Grima was sent to France, at the expense of the order, to complete his medical studies. On his return he was entrusted with the post-mortem examination of those who died of obscure diseases. Grima was a very popular lecturer, and in 1781 as a help to his students he published a work on anatomy in two volumes. At this time medical studies were pursued in Malta with great zeal. In 1772 even a young lady was sent to study surgery at Florence at the expense of the order.

The following report to the Grand Master from the Commission of the Treasury, dated April 24, 1766,¹ shows the interest taken in the study of anatomy :—

“ We have the honour to report that Anthony Mayer, a Surgeon Major of the Swiss regiment, made a present to the Order of nineteen well-made anatomical models in coloured wax and the model of a human body of the same material. These models will help the study of Anatomy during the hot months when dissection is not possible owing to the dangers ensuing from the operating on the dead body in this climate and at that season. We have therefore sent these models to the Hospital, to be placed in the Library. As we should like to show our gratitude to the said Major Mayer, who refuses to accept any compensation for his good work, we feel in duty bound to ask your Eminence to decorate him with the half cross of our Holy Order and to exempt him from payment of the usual fee. This petition was granted on the 15th March, 1766.”

The hospital of the order was kept under a strict discipline, so that the students had the best training that could be given in those days.

¹ *Ibid.*, cclxxii, 1766-1769, tergo.

As early as the year 1682, students were granted a licence to practise medicine after having attended the hospital for at least ten years. The regulations for the good government of the Sacred Hospital of the Sovereign Order of Jerusalem, published in 1714, show the great care taken in the education of medical men.

The chief physicians and the chief surgeons were appointed by the Grand Master, the ordinary practitioners were selected by the Venerable Hospitaller. The practitioners had to show that they had obtained a degree at a recognized university, had attended for two years the Great Hospital of the order and had been examined and approved by the chief physician of the order (*the protomedico*).

The principal medical officer paid a daily visit to the wards accompanied by the barber surgeon (*maestro della fisica*) who was always ready, together with his assistants (*barberotti della fisica*) to apply the remedies ordered by the physician; two pharmacy assistants (*spezialotti*) were also in attendance to prepare the prescriptions. Special regulations for the hospital were drawn up in 1725.¹ A medical man was to be specially employed to give public daily lectures in anatomy and to train students in medical work. A public academy was to be held every Wednesday in which a discussion on current diseases took place.

A barber-surgeon (*barbiere fisico*) was employed to let blood and to apply poultices and blisters. He was helped by two young assistants (*ajutanti per fisica*). The staff of the hospital, at the time, consisted of three principal officers, two practitioners (*pratici*), one lecturer in anatomy, three principal surgeons and lithotomists, two assistant practitioners (*pratici di chirurgia*), six young assistants (*barberotti ajutanti*), one barber-surgeon (*barbiere fisico*), two assistants (*ajutanti per fisica*) and a trained woman for the treatment of skin diseases. There was also a pharmaceutical chemist and five assistants.

More stringent regulations concerning the medical profession were enacted in 1764 under the Grand Mastership of Fra Emm. Pinto. A committee, called collegio, was formed, consisting of three principal medical officers and the chief surgeon of the Great Hospital. This committee was entrusted with the supervision of all medical and sanitary questions.

Article 2 of these regulations runs as follows:—

“No person, either native or foreigner, shall dare to practise Medicine or Surgery without a written licence from the Sanitary Committee (*Collegio di*

¹ “Notizie della Sacra Infermeria,” 1725, p. 6.

Sanita), and those who graduated in a Royal University, or obtained a licence from the late chief medical officer (*protomedico*) or any other chief medical officer, shall not dare to practise Medicine or Surgery before submitting their privileges and their licence to the said Committee and obtaining their approval in writing, under the penalty of five ounces to be applied to our Treasury.”¹

The code of laws of Grand Master de Rohan, published in 1784, regulated further the practice of medicine in these islands. Nobody was allowed to practise medicine or surgery without a special warrant from the Grand Master and a licence from the chief medical officer (*protomedico*). The *protomedico* could not grant a licence to practise even to those who were in possession of a privilege or a degree, unless the physician or the surgeon had practised in the hospital of the order, the former for six years, and the surgeons for four years. Those who wished to practise as barber-surgeons had to practise in the hospital of the order for at least two years.² Medical studies continued to be conducted in the Great Hospital of the order and licences to practise medicine granted by the *protomedico*, under the authority of the Grand Master, to the end of the eighteenth century, or better to the end of the order's rule in Malta, brought about by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798. That the medical school of the Hospital of the Knights of Jerusalem was in no way inferior to similar institutions of the minor states of Europe we have it from contemporary writers and from the works published by Maltese medical men both in Malta and abroad.

The following are the principal contributions to medical and scientific literature :—

1603. Mamo, Dr. Gregorio : “ Relazione circa lo stato dell'isola di Malta in occasione del morbo pestilenziale.”
1623. Hasciak, Marc Antonio : “ La Grotta di San Paolo.”
1631. Pace, Marco : “ De morbus animi.”
1638. Imbroli, F. Salvatore : “ Specula Melitensis.”
1689. Bonamico, Gio. Francesco : “ Fucus spicatus coccineus Melitensis.”
1677. Hasciak, Laurentius : “ De postrema Melitensi, lue praxis historia,” Panormi, 1677.
1723. Imbert, Gregorio : “ An ægotantes imaginarii, sola diversitate idearum, rejecto omni remediorum apparatu sanandi sint, 1723.”
1748. Demarco, Gius. : “ Tractatus mechanicus de Non-naturalibus, &c.” ; “ In lingua latina, ex anglica conversus.”

¹ “ Bandi e Comandamenti,” 1764.

² “ Del dritto Municipale di Malta (codice Rohan),” 1784.

1759. Demarco, Gius.: "De Lana, rite in secunda et adversa valetudine adhibenda (Melitae in Palatio)," MSS. 35-39, Public Library, Valletta: unpublished works by the author.
1760. Demarco, Gius.: "Dissertatio de Cocholata, ejus usu et abusu in Medicina (Melitae in Palatio)."
- 1763-1787. Demarco, Gius.: "De philosophiae experimentalis natura"; "Tractatus de morbis pectoris"; "Fasti morborum Melitenses"; "Tractatus de affectuum cutaneorum."
1749. Locano, Dr. Giorgio. "Dissertatio physiologica de mechanico feminarum tributo." (Montpellier.)
1774. Locano, Dr. Giorgio: "De Imperio Musculorum." "De Imperio gangliorum," and over 154 papers on scientific subjects.
1791. "Tentamen medico-anatomicum de novo spinalis medullae ductu (Melitae in Palatio)."
1748. Henin, Dr. Gabriele: "Observatio chirurgico-anatomica in Nosocomio S. Joannis Hierosolymitani." Anno 1748 collecta.
1749. Bernard, Dr. Salvatore: "Trattato filosofico-medico dell'uomo e sue principali operazioni" (in Catania stamperia del Dott. Bisagni, vol. 1 in 8, p. 111).
1762. Cren Fort, Antonio: "Tractatus physico-medicus de Americana Lue."
1756. Grima, Dr. Michel Angiolo:—
 "De cranii repercussione" (sent to the Royal Academy of Paris).
 "On the Injuries of the Spleen" (read in the Academy of Florence in 1756; printed in 1760).
 "On Popliteal Aneurism, 1773" (printed in London).
 "Istituzioni d'Anatomia," Venezia, 1781 (a manual for his pupils at the hospital of the order).
 "Della Medicina traumatica e vulneraria" (Florence, 1773).
 "Del nuovo e sicuro metodo di cucire gli intestini" (Paris, 1760).
 "Della sensibilita dei tendini" (translated in Paris, 1760).
1797. Barth, Giuseppe. "La estrazione della cateratta, per lo operatore esercitate" (Vienna, 1797).

The Malta University was abolished by a decree of Napoleon on June 18, 1798, and replaced by a central school with seven professors to teach mechanics, mathematics, astronomy, navigation, physics, chemistry and Oriental languages.

When Malta passed under the British rule, Sir Alexander Ball, the first British Commissioner, reinstated the University, and on October 28, 1800, appointed Canon Saverio Caruana, one of the popular leaders of the Maltese in their rising against the French, director of public instruction in these islands. The letter of appointment was practically a

new charter of our educational establishments. In 1802, Sir Charles Cameron, who succeeded Ball as Royal Commissioner, instructed the rector to confer the usual degrees on the graduates of the University. A general council of the University was constituted with forty members, ten of whom represented the Faculty of Medicine or Collegium Medicum. A medical licence, signed by the members of the medical committee, was granted under the authority of the Governor. Later on, the form of the licence was modified, and it was granted to candidates at the end of their courses of studies. The licentiate underwent a final examination, and was granted the diploma of doctor of medicine, signed by the rector and the secretary of the University. A few years later, the granting of the licence was discontinued, and the diploma of doctor of medicine was granted after the final examination. The reading of the diploma was also changed.

A Royal Commission, sent to Malta in 1834 to report on the affairs of the island in general, suggested important modifications in the University curricula. The course of studies was divided into four faculties—viz., that of philosophy and arts, medicine, jurisprudence and theology, each with a special council, but all under the direction of a general council presided over by the rector of the University.

In 1879, Sir Patrick Jakeman (?), a resident commissioner of national education in Ireland, was sent to Malta to inquire into the educational system of Malta. An exhaustive report was drawn up on all branches of education. As regards the University, he insisted on a reorganization of the arts faculty and a matriculation examination. The statute drawn in 1881 on his recommendation, though altered as to minor details in 1898, 1906 and 1915, remains in force to the present day. The curriculum of the medical school has been brought up to the standard of other universities, and the medical degree of the Malta University is registrable with the General Council of Medical Education in England.

The greatest distinction of the medical school of Malta is its direct connexion with the famous order of the Knights of Jerusalem. When Peter the Hermit gathered the Christian knights for the deliverance of the holy city, Gerard, the rector of the modest hospital of St. John, was the first to help the Crusaders in their need. The rich knights soon vied with each other to endow the house of St. John, and the pious fraternity became soon a rich and popular association.

The brotherhood, armed by Du Puis to defend the holy places and the hospital, flourished in Jerusalem, and kept the standard of

Christendom flowing in Cyprus and in Rhodes under the greatest adversities. It was in Malta, however, that the Knights-Hospitallers became the chief bulwark of Christendom, and developed the hospital as the finest institution of their time. It was in Malta that the hospital gave rise to a medical school, and it was left to Maltese students to keep alive the traditions of the knights in the relief of distress.

The last war has revived the old spirit, and Malta was offered the opportunity of playing the part of nurse of the Mediterranean, as the holy Gerard nursed the Crusaders of the eleventh century, in their attempt to reconquer the holy city of Jerusalem.