

A Protest Letter from Gozo During the Birth of Press Freedom in Malta

JOSEPH GALEA

Introduction

The first half of the 19th century and the beginning of British rule in Malta was not a happy time for the Maltese. The population suffered a plague epidemic in 1813 that left the Maltese destitute and very poor. (Clare, 1981: 235-255). Beggars roamed the streets of Malta and Gozo (Bonello, 2013) and many people emigrated to the British possessions in North Africa such as Tripoli, Tunis and Cairo. (Busuttil, 1965: 1-22). The suffering Maltese wanted some say in the decisions that affected their lives and livelihood. The British Government saw Malta as a Fortress Colony and was not ready to compromise its hold on the islands.

On the 1st April 1835, King William IV (Figure 1) gave instructions on the installment of a constitution

for Malta¹ granting the establishment of a 'Council of Seven' to assist the government in the running of the archipelago.

This council was made up of the Governor and his deputy, the Principal Government Secretary and another official member and three nominated members (two of whom were at all times to be Maltese). The Bishop of Malta was offered a nominated seat but he refused it. (Staines, 2015: 268). In the summer of the same year, Giorgio Mitrovich (Figure 2) went to London to plead with the British members of Parliament for more freedom in the administration of the country and for the liberalisation of the press.

Months of lobbying and insistence with the government lawmakers in London by Mitrovich



Figure 1: King William IV (1765-1837).

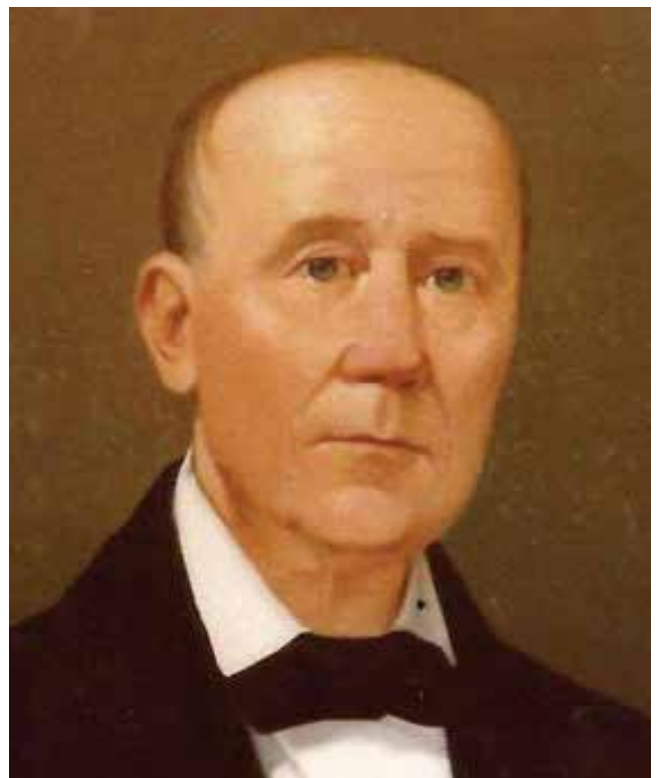


Figure 2: Giorgio Mitrovich (1795-1885).

¹ Colonial Office Dispatch number 159/12 of 1 April 1835. National Archives, Rabat, Malta.

(Mitrovich, 1836) persuaded the British to send a fact-finding Royal Commission to Malta.² The Commission was made up of the celebrated jurist John Austin (Figure 3) accompanied by his wife Sarah Austin (Figure 4) and the 30-year-old Mr (later Sir) George Cornwall Lewis (Figure 5) who had already served as a commissioner in Ireland in an enquiry about poverty and education in that country (Mangion, 2015).

The Commissioners arrived in Malta on board HMS Vernon (Figure 6) on the 19 October 1836 (Malta Government Gazette, 1836) at a time when Malta was expecting the newly elected Governor Major General Sir Henry Frederick Bouverie to arrive on the islands to take up the post after Governor Sir Frederick Cavendish Ponsomby (Figure 7) resigned because of ill-health.

The Commission investigated the lack of press freedom, the revenue from importation duty and the serious social problems of the time; mainly poverty,

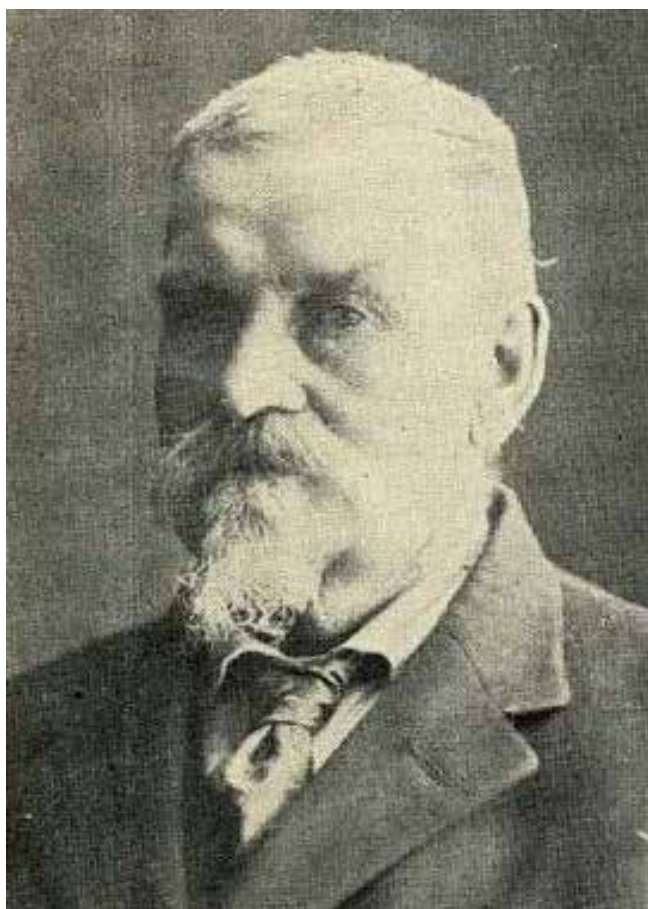


Figure 3: The Jurist John Austin (1790-1859).



Figure 4: Sarah Austin nee Taylor (1793-1867). From a drawing by Mrs Opie.



Figure 5: Sir George Cornwall Lewis (1806-1863).
[Picture courtesy of <https://www.cymmrodorion.org/cy/the-counterfactual-case-for-sir-george-cornwall-lewis/>].

² Remarks on the Third Report of the Irish Poor Inquiry Commissioners,' &c. (London, 1837, 8vo; also printed in vol. li. of the 'Parliamentary Papers' for 1837, pp. 253-290).

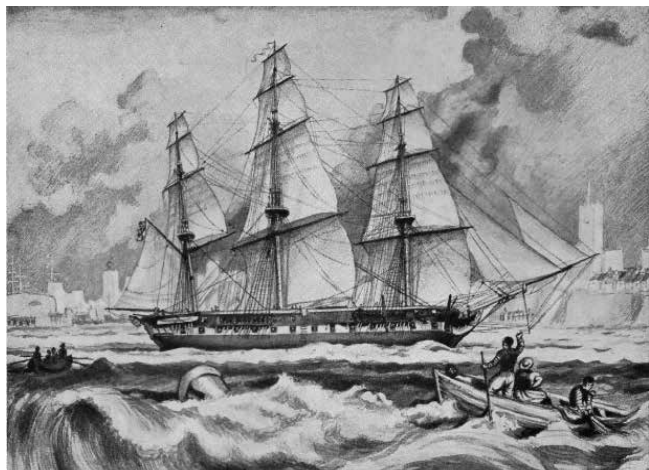


Figure 6: HMS Vernon designed by Sir William Symonds and launched in Woolich on May Day 1832 brought the Royal Commissioners to Malta on 19 October 1836.



Figure 7: Governor Frederick Cavendish Ponsomby (1783-1837).

high unemployment and the huge deficiency in learning and education. The Commission remained in Malta for two years during which time the population had to face the devastating effects of a cholera epidemic in summer 1837. The Commissioners' work was abruptly terminated for unknown reasons (Ross, 1888: 123) and in their subsequent report they recommended the removal of print censorship and proposed and urged the government to open more schools and heavily invest in teaching and education.³ Sarah Austin, who was a writer, did her utmost to get help to improve education and culture appreciation. The people regarded her as friend of the Maltese.

³ Report of the Royal Commission into the Affairs of Malta, London 1839.

⁴ Used to be called also *Il-Kaulata* which means a soup made up of a mixture of pork, a lot of multiple vegetables and a small amount of pasta. It also means 'making a mess'. In the context it is '*kaulata ta Malti u Inglis*' or a messy mixture of Maltese and English.

⁵ The other printer was Luigi Tonna.

⁶ He was fined 6 months imprisonment or a fine of two hundred and fifty scudi.

⁷ The *Ghaqda Kittieba tal-Malti* (established in 1920) presented an alphabet in 1921 and a book of grammar and spelling rules in 1924.

The Ordinance for the Freedom of the Press conditional to libel legislation against slander was published on 14th March 1839 but newspapers and other publications were already being printed unofficially since the middle of 1838. One of the earliest newspapers was called 'The Harlequin' (*L'Arlecchin* in Maltese)⁴ and was published by James Richardson, a protestant missionary and a backer of the British institutions in Malta. It was printed at the Filippo Izzo printing press, one of two printers⁵ established at the time. The first issue of 'The Harlequin' appeared on 12th July 1838. It was written mainly in the English language but also carried script in Italian and Maltese. It was a controversial newspaper, tabloid type, very provocative and defended the British Government when it dragged its feet to establish Maltese political representation. It attacked the Catholic Church vociferously insisting that it was keeping the people backwards and ignorant. 'The Harlequin' was the first Maltese newspaper to be found guilty of libel and Mr Richardson ended up in prison when he was found guilty of slandering the church.⁶ He was released from prison after he paid a hefty fine.

In the Thursday 6th December 1838 issue of 'The Harlequin' No. 42 (Figure 9) pages 167-168 there is a letter from a correspondent from Gharb, Gozo dated 30th November 1838.

The Letter

The letter (Figures 10 and 11) is written in phonetic dialectal Maltese in Roman letters and in the first person plural. As was the norm in those days, the Maltese text was written and printed using no established grammatical structure.⁷ It is assumed it was printed as was sent by the author. The letter is sarcastic and tongue in cheek and the author was well aware what was going on in Malta although he was living in the furthest location of the Archipelago. My intention here is not to discuss the grammatical and orthographical value of the Maltese script written in the letter but to highlight a political point of view from a seemingly disadvantaged person in the early months of press freedom in Malta.



Figure 9: The Frontispiece of The Harlequin no 42 of 6th December 1838.

The letter opens with a sarcastic apology: *Aħfrilna ġħax ma nafux niktulek bit-Taljan u anqas bl-Ingliż, iżda nisperaw li inti tifhem bl-Għawdx* (forgive us that we don't know how to write in Italian or English, but we hope you understand Gozitan). Then the correspondent asks what happened to the two commissioners that came from London to Malta. *Nixtiequ nġħarf* u x'inhu li sar minn dawġ iż-żewġ *Sinjuri Kummissarji li kienu ġew minn Londra lejn Malta*. He knew that they had returned to the United Kingdom and what he meant to say was to enquire why they had left abruptly and what they had achieved.

The author writes about the exaggerated welcome feasts that occurred in Malta on the Commissioners' arrival, pulling the leg of the Maltese as he writes along. He builds up to a climax from the long awaiting, to the flag waving and the singing escalating to the shouting for joy. *Kemm kontu ilkom tistennewhom. Fl-aħħar ġewkom. Kemm ġrejt* u bil-bnadar *f'idejkom! Kemm hlejt* u xemġha u żjut!

Kemm ġħannejtu! Kemm ġħajjattu! (You had been eagerly waiting for them for such a long time. They arrived at long last. You have spent many a time running around waving flags! You have wasted so much oil and candle wax! You have sung so much! You have shouted for joy!).

The anti-climax follows abruptly with sarcasm: *Fl-aħħar inħnaqtu. Aħna qeġħdin hawn ġewwa l-Għarb u f'dan l-ferħ kollu ma konniex magħkom! Ixxurtjati Maltin!* (You got hoarse at the end of all that shouting. And what a shame we are here in Għarb and we could not join you in the merrymaking. How lucky you Maltese are!)

'We heard that when they (the Commissioners) arrived, they rested for a few days: and then started on their work regarding press freedom, grain, the Popular Council and other issues relating to Malta and Gozo. They spoke to lawyers, businessmen, priests, the gentry and people from the villages. The silversmiths, blacksmiths, carpenters, shoemakers and other leaders of craftsmen and everyone was giving his opinion. The Commissioners asked questions, listened and with great patience took notes.'

The letter writer continued that *kienu qalulna li l-Isqof⁸ u xi ftiit ta' madwaru ma kienux rieduha l-istampa libera; iżda qassisin oħra li ġħandhom fehma tajba żammew mal-poplu*. (we were told that the Bishop and some of the inner circle clergy did not want a free press, but other priests sided with the people). There is an indication here that the people in general wanted the freedom of the press but the church hierarchy tried to obstruct it.

The author's irony continues: *Fuq hwejjeġ oħra ma niftakrux sewwa kif kienu marru*. (We don't remember well how the other matters turned out to be). The letter writer cannot remember the outcome of the other issues because they were not given importance.

The Commission finished its task in July 1838 and Commissioner Lewis left while John and Sarah Austin stayed for a few more weeks and then returned to England. *Wara żmien konna smajna li*

⁸ Mons Francesco Saverio Caruana (1759-1847) and Bishop of Malta (1831-1847).

8. « Din in-niufa tinsab ghandi,
Jena biss li nik-kmandaha:
Izda trid tirtabat migħi
Qabel tista t'kun taraha. »
9. « Dauk li huma 'lsiera tighi
Jafu biss fein hi is-*Sbulia*;
Min il ktajjen tighi i-halli
Ma isib qatt hlief il kruħia. »
10. Ghad li jebes hua 'l jasar,
Jena hlif li nibqa mahha,
Qtait il giuenab, dhalt fix-xibka
U 'rtbatt fis bil ktajjen tabha.
11. Fuq ir-roti talha 'mbagħad
Hi ghaddietni qalb il folla,
F'ghanza nahda il gmiel urietni,
U 'l kruħia tan-niufi kolla.
12. Fis sibt ruli geuua is-sema,
Fil Palaz tal *Fantasia*;
Il din sibt iudaura kolla
Bil migimgha tax-xubia.
13. Bqait mistagħgeb, la bdeit uara,
Dak il gmiel u dik il hleuua;
Dak il ghaxq u dak il hena
Tat-tfajliet li sibt emm geuua.
14. La lembitni na l'*Imhabba*
Diq l'imbiercha *Fantasia*;
« Fittex, » qaltli, fost dan-niufi
Is-Sultan tas-*Sbulia*.
15. Fis ghajnejja bedgħu jiberu
Bdejt infittex, magħwel bdejt,
Ma stajt izda qatt insiba,
Għax fil folla iechonfondajt.
16. Rāt l'*Imhabba* dit-tabbila,
Vleggia fis puntāt għal-ia;
U bil mera talha 'mghagħla
Giet quddiem il *Fantasia*.
17. Ekk kif qalbi għed mintuda
Il *Fantasia* serqitieli,
U l' mument ma tas-*Sbulia*
B'hilla kbira bidliteli.
18. « Dat-tesor, » imbagħat qaltli,
« Gej mis-sema u mill' allāt,
Jista biss jara is-*Sbulia*
Min tassew ieħun namrāt. »
19. « M'ux l' istess qulhatt jaraha,
Għax uisq huma id-doni talha,
Kolla il *Grazzi* meta tnieldej
Daru bilha, u baqghu mahha. »
20. Li uicc uieħel dina chella
La hemm dinja, lanqas hbieħ,
Billi kienet *Liena* nahda
Marret *Troja* fu-nār u 'l hrieb.
21. Kif fil mera bdejt inhares
Ta l'imbiercha *Fantasia*,

Fir-ritratt ta *Nina* tighi
Qalbi sabet is-*Sbulia*.

22. Meta lila raħ tassewa
Dlook għaliha jen theggigt
Fost is-sbieħ jen siħta l' isħal,
Mahha fis jen izzeuigt.
23. Ferhan bilha, 'rgiait lid-dinja
Bil għarusa li jen kont sibt,
Izda hatt ma baqa 'mghaggeb
Kif fis-sema jen kont hsibt.
24. Kulhatt qal li hi sabiha,
Fuqa 'nsabn bosta doni:
Izda, bliefi, hatt ma sata
Isib fiha il perfezjoni.
25. Għat li chont minfuh u 'mhellel
Bil għarusa li għibt migħi,
U chont hsibt lid-dinja kolla
Sejra tfahhar il gost tighi.
26. Rajt tassen chemm uciuh thiddel,
U chemm tqarraq is-*Sbulia*:
Rajt li biss hi tid-dipendi
Mill'*Imhabba* u 'l *Fantasia*.

GHENJUD MALTI.

Alla magħna, uliedi, u Malta hamina!
Ehgem meta is-sib, la taqtasc qalbek: għal-
liese għad jista jigi ir-randau barra mix-zmien.
Fuja hemm il għasel, jersaq in-nahal.
Kliem nisq, fejda tūt.
Li għadda nafuh li gej nobsrub.
Lil min għandu Alla jatih,
U l' min magħandusc Alla ihennih.
Uara it-thatia u 'l għaraq, chiecu nahiegħin
il farag.

Għandesc il Għarb 30 Novembru
Sena 1000, 800, u. 8, 30, Nisrania.

Sur Arlecchin,

Aħrinna għasc ma nafusc nictbulek bit-Ta-
lian u anquas bl' Inglis, izda nispirau li iuti
tifhem ukull bil Għauci.

Nisctiequ oagħarfu scinu li suar min dauq
ix-zeug Signuri Commissiunaworj, li chieħu gen
min Londra hem f' Muolta. Kem kuntu il-
chom tistenneuchom! Flahhar geuchom. Kem
gireitu bi huadar l' ideichom! Kem bleitu
sciama u zint! Kem għannuħu! Kem għaj-
jattu! Flahhar imħaqtu. Ahna ja hasra qegħ-
din hannu geuua il Għarb, u l' dana il feħ
qulla ma kinniesc magħchom! Tsciurtnoti
Maltin!!!

Meta uaslu, qunna smaina, qagħdu jistriħu

Figure 10: The first part of the letter from Għarb, Gozo on page 167 (lower part of column 2) in *The Harlequin* (no 42) 6th December 1838.

ghal f'it giruonet: imbghat qabdu gha scioghol tabhom fuq l'istampa libra, fuq il qamh, fuq il Cunciliu Popolari, u fuq huejjez uhra tal Gzira ta Muolta u ta Ghaudesc. Tchellmu ma l'avicuoti, man-niguzanti, mal qassisin, mal mezzuoni, ma nies ta rhula. L'argintieri, il haddieda, il mastrudasci, l'iscruopar, u tas-soaja l'uhra chellhom il capiet tabhom, u qulhatt igheit il fahma ta ruosu. Il Commissiunorj jistaqsu, jisimghu, u bil pasansia qulla jiqibu. Kienu qalulna, li l'Isqof u sci f'it ta maduaru ma chinusc reduha l'istampa libra; isda qassisin uhra, li ghandom fahma taiba, zammea mal puoplu. Fuq il huejjez l'uhra ma nistaqruse seuna chif chieau marru.

Uara xmienu qanna smaina li huma striehu: imbghat li uihet minhom siefer, li l'ihor chien qaghat f'it uraih, u li dana chellu mara thubbom uisq il Maltin, li chienet thub tiseu busta, tingiep ma qulhatt, u bilua fi chliema u f'chollose actar, mil labhar cannuol tal cannamieli. Jalla qulhatt phuola! Fl'ahhar nett dis-Signura siefret uqull mas-Signor tahha, u busta Maltin pgeua. Kellhom ragiun.

Leuel ma chienet mitluba l'istampa libra, u dina nofsa giet moghita. Ahna ma qunniese nuofu scinhu li t'fisser, u lema git jista jigi minha: isda imbghat sci ergha min-nies ta rashom kbira fissrulna scinhi di l'istampa, u ahna frahna ta bla tarf. Isda fuq il qamh scia-ghaidu? (din il huagia ma nafuse innein hi geija). Il qamh baqa chif chien, le mense chif chien, anzi ghola: u qalulna, li jech jipqa f'idein min hu, noqoghdu tajjep. Qasba zeit ghuodna nisctruha chif qunna; sih fabam uchull, huejjez uhra phal ma chienu, u f'it aghar. Mela l'istampa libra biss! Qulhatt ihoss il bsunniet tighu, ahna chelna bzun ta huejjez uhra uqul.

Signur nitulbuq tabfrilna, ghase fursi ma chelniese nithlu fi huejjez phal dauna; u ktibnielech daun l'erba chelmiet, biese jech igun hem sci huogia ma dua li nisctiequ ahna tibghat tghidilna, jech joghgboch. Ahna dejjem inhobbuhom il-l'Inglisi, u dejjem nisteneu minhom, isda itteuna u ittenna u itteana, fl'ahhar immutu, u immorra jeu l'Infern, jeu il Purgatoriu, jeu il Genna.

Sefturi tighach,

Il Ghaucin.

—Qat, qat f' Malta ma saret festa bhal ma saret ghar-Regina taghua ADELAIDE. Fix-xmienu il Cavalieri, tasseu illi chieunu misdaqpiet jaghamu sci scialata, imma bhal dina qat. Fuq il *Men Gard*, qoddiem il Palazz, chien mimli bl'imsiebah, u chollimchien fitraqat, issa hoga u issa obra, mdanar bid-daulijet, sata uiebed jara chem tabilhaqq jhobbu il Maltin ir-Regina tabhom. Sahha ghali-chom, ja giuvinu galbati, illi ilqaituha fisciatt, u ureitu b'tant piacir ir-rispett taghgom. Mase ghase irrid nghidu, imma sigur illi ma satghitisc tquu milqugha ahjar. Forsi nara dana igunu jistghu jghidu li manhobbuse l'Inglizi. Forsi nara dana sci hat jemmen dauq li jissindichauna, u illi jghidu li il Maltin ma ghandhomse mhabba lein is-sovrani tabhom. Anzi, chiequ riedet ir-Regina erfainiha fuq qlubna, mase bis fuq ideina, u uasalniha il palazz. Iva, ja ADELAIDE taghna, fil poplu ta Malta illi igemgha ma duarech il-mabt bosta illi huma pronti biese, jscerdu demmbom ghalich, u ghalavoglia isc-scita nehhiat l'isem li chitbulech fuq l'arch li armau ghad-dabla tighach, la scita, u la scemse, u la scien li jista jigri ma inehhi min qlubna it-tifchira u l'imhabba tighach.

SUNETT.

Iva habbeit; dejjem n'istqarru issena,

Ma mundu bedghet t'iddi i scemse ghalia,
Ebda ma trabbiet qatt, min sidri il geuna
Bhal din l'imhabba l'int nissilt gio fia.

Ghainejk u fommok uma iz-zeng t'eghedna
Li jassru il qalbi biese ma t'kun mifdia:
Dak fommok scchida min tal ehla hleuca
Ghajnejk zeug kuiekeb min tal isbah dia.

Minnhom t'ghallimt scinhu ferh u tnehid:
I snin ghalihom, majidralisc ghair gmigti:
Fihom insib kol ma n'iscetieq ur-rid.

Sabar ghalia ma hemse, ek muniiese mighi
Kliem fierah nara il bena, il baja il gid
Huma gldi, huma haiti il bena tighi.

Il ligijet ta l'Inghilterra huma maghmulin l'certa maniera illi is-Sovrani huma appuntati mil poplu biese jaran illi dauka illigijet huma osservati, u hek l'imhabba li igibu il poplu lir-rejjet tabhom dejjem hia tista tkun, u ma tindahase mal-libertà tabhom. Daka li jobdi illigijet u ihobb ir-Re hua sudditu liberu.

Malta—Stampat min Izzi u Sicilbu, u jimbich fil casse ta Salva Said l'hara Riali Numru 248.

Figure 11: The second and last part of the letter from Gharb in The Harlequin Number 42 of 6th December 1838.

huma strieħu: imbagħad wieħed minnhom siefer (Lewis) u l-ieħor qagħad ftiit warajh u li dan kellu mara thobbhom wisq lill-Maltin (Sarah Austin). (Later, we had heard that they rested: one of them went back home while the other stayed on longer and the latter had a wife who was fond of the Maltese.)

Sarah Austin empathised with the Maltese and during her two-year stay in Malta did her best to improve the education system and the general situation of the indigenous population. She also encouraged the arts. The author of the letter showed, tongue in cheek, contempt towards her and gave the impression that she was ‘a loose woman’. He wrote that *kienet thobb tiżfen bosta, tingieb ma kulhadd u helwa fi kliemha u f’kollox iktar mill-aħħar kannoll tal-kannamieli. Jalla kulhadd bħalha!* (she loved dancing, was liked by everyone and was very sweet in her talk and actions).

In the mid-19th century world of this writer hailing from a distant village in Gozo, the woman’s place was at home or in the fields, not getting involved in politics and prominence as this emancipated English woman was doing. *Fl’aħħar net din is-sinjura siefret ukoll mas-sinjur tagħha u bosta Maltin bkewha. Kellhom raġun* (In the end this lady left Malta with her husband and many Maltese cried her departure. They were right to do so). The sarcastic vein of the writer and his contempt towards her and the Maltese who were fond of her, may lead one to believe that he was very likely being ironic, although one cannot be completely sure about his intentions.

The Harlequin correspondent then touches on the achievements (or the lack of them) of the commission. *L-ewwel ma kienet mitluba kienet l-istampa libera u dina giet mogħtija nofsha.* (First of all, the Maltese asked for press freedom, and this was given by half). The author here points out that the freedom of the press was shackled with severe libel amendments. Then, in pseudo self-deprecation and cynicism he continued, *Aħna ma konniex nafu x’inhu li tfigger, u liema ġid jista jigi minnha: iżda mbagħad xi erbgħa minn nies ta’ rashom kbira f’issrulna x’inhu din l-istampa u aħna fraħna bla*

tarf. (We did not understand what this means, and what benefits this is going to give us: but then few important people explained to us what this was all about and this gave us endless happiness). Through these lines the writer is showing endless irony and sarcasm rather than endless happiness. In Maltese *rashom kbira* does not just mean important people but persons who project themselves as being important and the *fraħna bla tarf* is very cynical. This is a prelude for what he wanted to vent in the next few lines. In spite of the press freedom achievement, he laments that nothing happened to reduce poverty and to improve his lot. Their situation may have even deteriorated. At this point, the author becomes serious; *Issa fuq il-qamħ x’ser ngħidu. (Din il-ħaġa ma nafux mnejn hi ġejja). Il-qamħ baqa’ kif kien, le mhux kif kien anzi ġhola u qalulna jekk jibqa f’idejn min hu issa, nkunu tajjeb.* (How about the grain price? There was no price change, and if anything it is more expensive. We were told that if grain imports remain in the same hands, we will be fine.) The day-to-day matters that touched our writer either remained the same or got worse. *Qasba żejt għadna nixtruha kif konna; siegħ faħam ukoll, hwejjeġ oħra bħal ma kienu u ftiit aghar.* (the oil price is unchanged, the same with coal and other goods are either the same price or a little worse). *Mela l-istampa libera biss!* (Having press freedom is not enough) he complains, *Kulhadd iħoss il-bżonnijiet tiegħu, aħna kieku kellna bżonn ta’ hwejjeġ oħra wkoll.* (Everyone feels his own needs; we require other things too).

At the end of the letter, the author returns to his ironic tone and asks forgiveness from the editor *għax forsi ma kellniex nidhlu fi hwejjeġ bħal dawn* (maybe we should not have discussed these matters). However, in the same breath he tells the Harlequin editor that he wrote those few lines just in case he (the editor) gets to know something that might benefit the Gozitans and to inform them accordingly if it pleases him.

He closes his letter by writing that the Gozitans *dejjem inħobbuhom lil-Ingliżi u dejjem nistennew minnhom* (always loved the English and always expect ‘favours’ from them).⁹ He is sure he will never get anything from the government because

⁹ The same word also means ‘waiting to get’. The author uses a pun on this word *itenna* (*nistenna*). In the first part of the statement he is expecting something from the English Administration (*nistennew*) and later on he is waiting and waiting for them to help him with his needs (*itenna* or *nistenna*).

ittenna u ittenna u ttenna, fl-aħħar immutu u mmorru jew l-Infern, jew il-Purgatorju jew il-Ġenna (wait, wait and wait and in the end we die and go to Hell, Purgatory or Heaven). This Gozitan was not deluded.

The letter writer is sarcastic till the end and signs off; *Sefturi tiegħek, l-Għawdxin* (Your Servants, the Gozitans).

Conclusion

This is a stinging protest letter by a common man hailing from the furthest locality in Gozo. Freedom of the press did not put bread on his table. The festivities, the music, the discussions and the speeches did not help the needs of the common Maltese and Gozitans according to this writer. This letter is one of the earliest political statements by a common person on the islands through the newly born free press. Maybe the author of the letter did not realise that it was the freedom of the press that he believed unimportant that gave him the opportunity to announce his protest to the authorities.

The dialect used in the letter is definitely Gozitan.¹⁰ It is similar although not completely alike to today's Għarb dialect but one would expect some changes in the dialect in 180 years and therefore it is likely that the letter writer was from Għarb. He stated as such and there is no reason to doubt this.

Also, it is surprising that a letter criticizing the Colonial Government found its way into a pro-government newspaper. One would expect that Richardson knew the content although it was written in Maltese. He might have thought that this letter may partly address the perception of bias in favour of the government and its impact would be limited because it was written in the vernacular. He might also have found the style entertaining, and suited his newspaper.

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Joseph Galea graduated MD in Malta in 1985 and pursued training in Cardiothoracic Surgery in the UK. Elected FRCS from Edinburgh College of Surgeons in 1992 and Intercollegiate FRCS(CTh) in 2000. He was awarded a Doctorate in Medicine by research by Sheffield University in 2000. He was appointed Consultant Cardiothoracic Surgeon in 2001. In 2017 he was awarded MA by the University of Malta and in 2018 he was promoted as an Associate Professor by the University of Malta. He is currently the President of the Association of Surgeons of Malta.

¹⁰ The author is a Gozitan from Għarb and knows and practices both the Għarb and the Gozitan dialects.