

Portrait:

SIR LUIGI PREZIOSI (Part one)

Luigi Preziosi was born in Sliema on July 29th, 1888, son of the late eighth Count Preziosi, Alfred Preziosi and of the late Filomena (née Bonnici Azzopardi). He was educated at Flores College and then at the Royal Malta University (1904–1910), B.Sc. (1907) and M.D. (1910). Soon after qualifying he started the usual training at the Old Central Hospital.

At first he was interested in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, which in a sort of round-about way brought him into contact with Ophthalmology. The Maternity Department at the Central Hospital was next door to the Eye Department. When off duty Dr. Preziosi used to cross the courtyard to pay a visit to the ageing Professor of Ophthalmology A. Vassallo who was suffering already from failing vision. Soon he found himself helping the Professor and in a short time appointed assistant in the Ophthalmic Clinic. The next step was to proceed to the Ophthalmic Clinic at Rome Policlinic, where under Professor Cirincione, at that time very well known, he was able to obtain a good experience in eye surgery.

On April 29th, 1920 he married Ludgarda Chappelle, eldest daughter of the most Noble Baron Chappelle. During his honeymoon in Oxford, he was able to obtain the Diploma in Ophthalmology of the University of Oxford (Do. Oxon.), at that time the most important qualification in the speciality in the United Kingdom. In 1954 he was appointed Professor of Ophthalmology at the Royal Malta University and Ophthalmic Surgeon at the Central Hospital.

In the years between the two wars and for some years after the end of World War II, he was kept very busy fighting against the scourge of trachoma, a virus disease which was the cause of blindness of millions of people in the underdeveloped countries.

Low standard of living, overcrowding, lack of water, poor sanitation and poverty were the most important causes of the diffusion of trachoma. Most of these conditions existed in Malta in the twenties.

At that time the means at our disposal to combat



Preziosi in his teens

(Photo credit: Preziosi Family)



Preziosi, at the age of 12

(Photo credit: Preziosi Family)

trachoma were practically non-existent. We were still very far from the era of the sulphonamides and antibiotics. However, a lot could be done by surgical means, to prevent the frequent complications which led to corneal opacities and eventually blindness. It was this that Prof. Preziosi carried out to save the eyesight of thousands of Maltese patients.

The aim of the surgery was to restore the normal shape of the lid border and the position of the eyelashes, thus preventing the distorted eyelashes from injuring the cornea leading to infection, corneal opacities and blindness.

Even as late as October 1939, the task of the assistant to Prof. Preziosi (as I was at that time) was to epilate (remove) the distorted eyelashes caused by the scars left by the trachomation process.

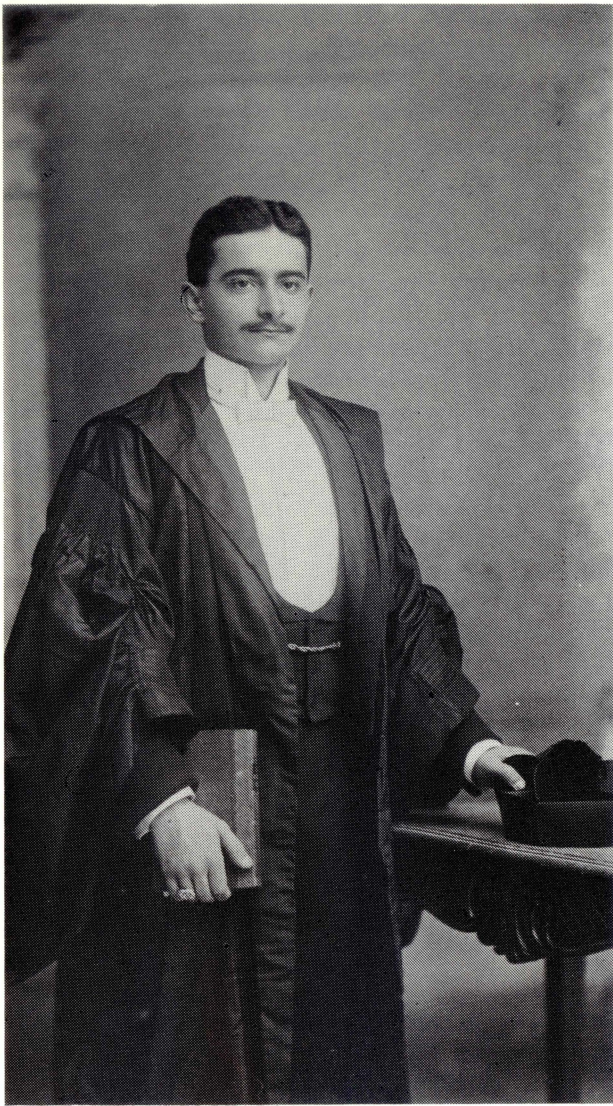
It was soon after his appointment as Ophthalmic Surgeon at the Central Hospital that he devised an operation for the treatment of chronic Glaucoma. The operation consists in the use of the electro-cautery to release the tension in cases where the circulation of intra-ocular fluid was blocked.

His interest in this operation was destined to dominate his whole life – a description of the operation was first published in September, 1924 on the British Journal of Ophthalmology and later on the same year at the annual meeting in Rome of the Italian Society of Ophthalmology. He had the opportunity of discussing the operation at various International Ophthalmological Congresses such as Amsterdam (1929), Cairo (1932), London (1950). In



L. Preziosi, during his University days, seated first row in the middle

(Photo credit: Preziosi Family)



Preziosi graduating as Doctor of Medicine from the University of Malta, 1910 (Photo credit: Preziosi Family)



Preziosi, during World War I, in 1915 (Photo credit: Preziosi Family)

the latter city as representative of the Maltese Government at the International Ophthalmological Congress he read a paper "Twenty five years of Galvano-Cautery in the treatment of Glaucoma". He also took part in the International Ophthalmological Congress of New York (1954). The last time he described the operation was at the Irish Ophthalmological Society in 1957.

At present the operation is described as Preziosi's Operation for Glaucoma in the most important textbooks on ophthalmic surgery.

The operation could be carried out under local anaesthesia. It was very simple, it took very little time, and was devoid of complications. For many years I performed the operation at St. Luke's Hospital with very satisfactory results.

On several occasions Prof. Preziosi represented the Faculty of Medicine at the General Medical Council of the Royal Malta University. Several times he was elected President of the Camera Medica.

For almost 50 years he was associated with the Royal Navy, at first this was in an unofficial capacity based upon a reputation of high professional skill and kindness of manner. Later on in 1955 he was appointed as a Civilian Consultant in Ophthalmology in the Royal Navy.

In World War I he was a Medical Officer with the St. John Ambulance Brigade attached to the R.A.M.C. During World War II he was Consultant to the Services.

In 1956 he was created Magisterial Knight of the Sovereign Military Order of the Knights of Malta. He was a member of the Ophthalmological Society of the U.K. and of the Italian Society of Ophthalmology. Prof. Preziosi was elected President of the Committee of Privileges Maltese Nobility since 1955.

F.J. Damato

(to be continued)