

Portrait (1)

SIR LUIGI CAMILLERI

Names are borrowed from others and bestowed on us because sounds please our donators or remind them of those who captured their confidence. Sir Luigi Camilleri was born on December 7th, 1892, at Victoria, Gozo. He is the son of Notary Giuseppe Camilleri and Matilde née Bonello.

Like a quiet Sunday morning, one wonders about the first years of the man who is over ninety-two. Sir Luigi was about to leave his childhood behind him and all the pleasing things which perhaps he should have taken advantage of, more often.

Father Miracapelli, the first Rector of the Jesuits' Seminary in Gozo, had advised his father that with a special grace from Bishop Camilleri, his son could start College in October 1899, though there were still the couple of months needed till his seventh birthday. He entered the Seminary in 1899.

From the maze of years we picked the impulsive, vital ones with the nuns of the Franciscan Order of Palma Street, Victoria, where he learnt the rules of the numbers and the rudiments of the English and Italian languages. Sir Luigi will always think with tenderness about the nuns who gave him, and the other sixty odd pupils, all they knew and instilled the mode of their self-realisation.

All the weekly mornings from eight to eleven were spent at school, and Filomena from Rabat, their maid, saw him daily from their residence in today's Republic Street to the nuns. The moment grew strong as he pointed out, and she remained a friend of theirs long after she married the shopkeeper Salvu Bajada.

Gozo then left little on his mind. He was full of expectations and bigger things. He spent his youth as a boarder at the Seminary which was, and still is, under the Bishop's Jurisdiction. When young Luigi was interviewed by the Rector, his standard was high enough to be admitted to Junior IV, but his age was still the drawback.

It was an established pattern that the holidays were passed at 57, Marina Street, Marsalforn till October 1st. His family's house was in Corsa Street, which today is the Telephone Exchange.

We all live through the daily movement and bustle of school but its importance comes to us when we move away from its scene. College started on October 1st, and finished on the last Sunday of July with the annual results and prizes.

Sir Luigi had fond and warm memories of his art master and Father Miracapelli, the Italian teacher.



Sir Luigi at the grand age of 92

Credit: P.E.G. Photo Library

These were like secret, noble and permanent portraits to him.

The Jesuits seem to have found the right element how to tackle and ease the general education that which fits a man to perform firstly and skilfully all offices both private and public. The system of the classes was planned with the main four year forms leading to matriculation. Sir Luigi passed his matriculation on June 13th, 1906.

The atmosphere became more communicative because he was choosing the teachers he liked best, like Father Albanese, a Jesuit who taught English in class V, and Father Mc.Hugh the young Scotch of twenty four – he who guided class IV, the students loved him, as a sensitive, sympathetic teacher and there was great regard between them.

One Wednesday on the weekly holiday, the boys gathered and went for a walk to Marsalforn. The weather was bad and the sea rough. Father Mc. Hugh loved swimming and stubbornly tried to cross from one end of the bay to the other side. The high waves separated him from the shore and they stood there helpless and in profound shock. He was lost. Though he repeated the story of this tragedy many times, still its reality is like a new experience to him. The past was wrapped clearly in Sir Luigi's mind.

Mostly all the teachers were Jesuits with some exceptions: Mr. C. Millard, the English teacher and

assistant secretary for Gozo (his father was British and his mother came from Bormla) and Father Longitano, the Italian master of Forms III and I. With a meaningful, constructive voice he went on: "He was a celebrity."

Physics in higher classes was taught by Father Robinson, aided by Dun Ġużepp Farrugia, a Gozitan. He was the same author who published the book *Id-Drawwiet tal-Maltin* (1909).

The sole applicable object of the daily college routine is a transplanting of temper where the mind is subdued and formed to what one may expect from life and learn the part sooner and better.

At the Seminary boys were on their feet at 5.15 a.m. except for Wednesdays and Sundays, when the alarm went at 6 a.m. Mass was said soon after; then an hour of study till the bell rang for coffee and recreation. School started at 8 a.m. sharp. Afterwards classes went on up to midday. Then came the observance of the washing of hands with three quarters practising the English language. This decree included all forms. After lunch the boys returned to study and did some reading, which left time for one more lesson and school was over at 4 p.m.

Now the students were free to choose either a walk or some other relaxation, such as the cloth football or the trampoline. This period was planned with fondness and with touches and retouches of what one could do in this sacred hour. When a light snack was over homeworks were done till 8 p.m., including the



Father Manwel Magri, S.J.

recitation of the Rosary, followed by supper. At 9 p.m. the designed day was over and off to bed. Their minds must have felt like a drama of classic Latin, grammatic flats, the construction of the principles, the groundings of abstract logic, physics and the crooked lines on the globe.

The symbolic figure of the Rector was surveyed by the boarders as an overseer with susceptible sentiments. After Father Grech, who was an obstetrician professor, his successor was Father Manwel Magri with his dignified doctorish airs. In his room the shelves were crammed more with medical books than with religious ones; still he secretly resented anyone who made fun of this. The Rector had great influence on the children and the general maxims of the College. In July during prize day, sometimes the Bishop or the Governor came to the hall and sat in the best seats in the front, and the boys in the background felt conscious of their achievements or of what they failed to apprehend.

Speeches proceeded about curriculum, attendance, results and goals of education.

Father Magri acted also as a parish priest to the British Catholic soldiers stationed at Chambray. He sent a priest on Sundays to say Mass in their chapel. Soldiers sometimes invited the boys to a game of football and these visits gained their goodwill and they enjoyed the change. The method to an exact disciplinary rule often carries concern and uneasiness on the students.



Sir Luigi elected to the Nationalist Party in 1921

Sir Luigi said: "One day our class ambassador, spy and headboy, later becoming Bishop Giuseppe Pace, delivered a message to me on the well-known tickets, which read that I was wanted in the Rector's room."

With forboding that he was about to come in collision with his superior, he gently tapped on the door. The boy entered and while Father Magri continued writing, he said: "Sit down!"

Finally he raised his head and went on: "Do you know where your surname is derived from?"

The youngster made no comment, but wondered that grown-ups could be repelling indeed.

"There was a village called, *Hal Millieri*, which during an earthquake was destroyed and from then on its name became *Camillieri*."

Without seeking his own ease, somehow the boy felt an air of superiority and asked: "Anything else?"

The Rector replied: "No, you can leave!"

Sir Luigi was, too, greatly bewildered and perplexed at his Father's attitude. He was like a child who hearkens with delight at the tales collected from the old villagers of Sannat. There was this special man with the many flower pots and while the boys watered his plants, he perhaps felt obliged to relate more stories. The Rector often picked two or three students and took them along for company. While they played, Father Magri pondered, asked questions, listened attentively and scribbled everything down.

Youth is frankness in itself. These boys little cared what was going around them, because they were hearty, vigorous and not old.

Sundays were special because they were visiting days, and were eagerly anticipated. Families went either at 10 a.m. or immediately after lunch. Weekly medals were distributed for first and second places. These had the sanction of power because one, then was complimented by the parents on the well-merited medals. They were discussed at length and treasured till the next time.

Sir Luigi remembered Edgar Hare, the band master's son, his friend who became a civil servant and worked in England and Ġuzi Muscat, who later became the editor of the *Herald*.

There were a couple of fathers that were very popular with the students: Father Fenech, a Capuchin, and Father Debono, a Jesuit, both of them meeting later in India.

Carnival was spent at College, but with stage plays, the costumes and a willing audience, all these unveiling a blissful day.

If the boys had not been discreet enough and slipped a few Maltese words during an English, Latin or Italian conversation class, the prefect who corrected the grammatical mistakes reprimanded them according to the act's seriousness. The breaking of a

glass or a scuffle were too punished by hours of silence.

Father Magri died in 1907, when he was away from Malta. At the Addolorata Cemetery, Jesuits and Maltese made a ceremony for him. To commemorate his death there is an epitaph on the wall.

Sir Luigi left College the year before the Rector's death. He had passed his matriculation.

Sir Luigi went to Malta and joined the Royal University in October, 1906. He always knew that he had this fixed predestined idea that Law was the work after his own heart. The fresh spirit of manhood strives to better a regret, a hope, but mostly the legacy of his name.

The course was divided in three preparatory years and four academic ones. Subjects were English, Italian, Philosophy and Latin. In the last year Economics, Politics and Statistics were introduced.

The first year was hard and students named it: "La porta degli asini". This was the trial period because



Portrait by John Borg-Gauci of Sir Luigi on the occasion of his Knighthood

Credit: P.E.G. Photo Library



though they might have started with a class of fifty students, by the beginning of the next October only eighteen might be left.

In this testing position one needed all his possibilities, and those who commenced with no kind of flourish or impressiveness could be the ones to surmount all obstacles.

At the University, in the Court and in the Seminary, Italian was the spoken language, till the Self-Government of 1921. Sir Luigi was at the University during 1906 – 13. Finally the class finished with some seventeen students, and these were some of his colleagues: Giuseppe Pace, Professor Carlo Mallia, Wyndham Grech, Giulio Cortis, Giovanni Bonnici, Manuel D. Agostino, Francis Tabone-Adami, Paul Mercieca and the unfortunate Carlo Refalo who died during the course.

The graduation was organised by the students and they decided who was to make the ceremonial speech.

Temi Zammit was chosen as the orator. A sub-committee was formed and some of its representatives approached Temi Zammit and suggested that the speech should be done in Maltese. He answered that it was already written and finished. They pointed out that they could help him translate it.

Temi Zammit was a gifted man and looked at the incident as looking at a painting, when one is more charmed with the subject than the painter's art.

Father Magro, the Rector, was so indignant that he never turned up for the ceremony, and the warrants were signed by Father Sciberras. In 1913 Sir Luigi graduated in Law. All these events were slowly sheared away with the contrast of the coming First World War.

Denise Micallef

(to be continued)



Sir Luigi with Princess Elizabeth and Archbishop Gonzi in 1951

Credit: P.E.G. Photo Library