

1880

A. CRITIEN

MALTA PUBLIC LIBRARY

198487

Holy Infirmary Sketches

~~27450(L)~~
1

LUX PRESS

MALTA

1946

RA
964
.C75



Air picture of one of the many devastated areas in Valletta, showing nearly the whole perimeter of the Infirmary block. The Infirmary, though hit and blasted seven times between February the 14th, 1941 and the 26th July, 1943, escaped total destruction. But it was badly maimed:—part of its Sda. Mercanti front was knocked down; only one wall of the Infirmary's State Room was left standing; several roofs were blasted off and a huge hole cut into the *Sala dell'Infermeria* right down to the *Magazzino* Ward below it; and a general shattering of the whole building shook off most of the open balcony—a posthumous 19th Century growth—from its Grand Harbour front. On the right, the shell of the Nibbia Chapel still keeps watch over a field of rubble and ancient dust.

PREFACE

AS we advance in age the future loses its glamour and our interests turn unconsciously to the past. This is why some of us take to collecting "any old thing", from prints to match boxes, according to our turn of mind and to our means, and others to rummaging in libraries amongst old books—all pursuits which, though apt to make one foolishly vain of possessing or knowing something that others do not, should still be counted innocent dissipations.

This would not be a sufficient apology for my rushing into print, were it not that these "Sketches" may help one to get more intimately acquainted with one of the essential institutions of an Order whose presence here added considerably to the historical importance of our Islands and, coinciding as it did with that wonderful period of European revival of all the arts and letters, contributed in no small way to the renewal and growth of our culture.

Hence these "Sketches" are intended as a small acknowledgement of the services the Order of St. John of Jerusalem has rendered to these Islands as well as of the more direct part it has played in fostering and shaping the natural humanitarian instincts of their inhabitants.

But I have other acknowledgements to make, this time to the living. The first is to the Hon. Mr. Justice W. Harding B.Litt., LL.D., who has been pleased to give these "Sketches" his blessing. As I know Judge Harding to be a keen and experienced assessor of the values of men and of their attainments, his appreciation of my attempts to be useful to others makes me exceedingly proud, a feeling which I hope will likewise be counted a venial sin. Chev. H.P. Scicluna L.P., M.B.E., M.A., (Hon. Oxon) and Air Vice-Marshal K.B. Lloyd C.B.E., A.F.C. come next, the first for allowing me to reproduce here four prints from a collection of negatives of great local value lately acquired by the Malta Museum and for his help in other ways; to the second I am greatly indebted for the post-blitz view of the Holy Infirmary from the air. Nor must I forget to thank Mr. C. G. Zammit,

Curator of the Archaeological Section of the Museum and Miss Castaldi, Assistant Librarian, Royal Malta Library and the Staffs of both Departments, whose reserve of patience my numerous wants and inquiries have proved to be inexhaustible.

My account of the Holy Infirmary Plate appeared in 1943, in "Scientia", the Quarterly Review so ably edited by Fr. Seraphim M. Zarb O.P., S.Th. Mag., S. Script. Doct. by whose kind permission it is reproduced here.

A.C.

Dec. 1945.

FOREWORD

In a letter to Tacitus, Pliny considered as happy those who could *do* things worth recording or *write* things worth reading, and most happy those to whom it was given to do both. Dr. Critien, it appears, belongs to this latter dual category.

He was the first to establish the true nature of splenic anaemia in Maltese children as a form of leishmaniasis, a disease prevalent in all Mediterranean countries, and, also, to confirm the presence of the same infection in dogs. His report on the subject was published in 1911, in the *Annals* edited by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, and it also engaged the attention of the "Institut Pasteur de Tunis". It was later eulogised in a lecture on "Kala-Azar in Malta, with some remarks on the various Leishmaniasis", delivered by Dr. C.M. Wenyon, M.B., B.S., B.Sc. at a meeting of the Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, in 1918. He has had, since, ample opportunity to show his keen interest in the protection and well-being of children by his whole-hearted participation in the work of the Mothers' and Infants' Health Association and of the Malta War Memorial Hospital for Children.

In this small book Dr. Critien has thrown fresh light on an interesting part of old-time Valletta. The subject which he has chosen is one not only close to his heart but also one particularly within his competence as Chief Government Medical Officer in Malta for the period of nineteen years up to the first of October 1936.

In the first part of the book the author deals with the Holy Infirmary (Sacra Infermeria) from a general standpoint with a wealth of detail which shows that the author possesses in no uncertain manner "an infinite capacity for taking pains". His laborious researches and diligent studies have brought to light many details, hitherto unknown, about this sixteenth-century Hospital of the Knights. The nursing of the sick and wounded was the main object of the Order's existence, and, throughout their chequered history, whether in Jerusalem, Rhodes or Malta, the Knights had always been renowned for their work as

Hospitallers. The late Dr. Laferla does not hesitate to state, in his History of Malta, that, at that time, the Sacra Infermeria was the best hospital in the Mediterranean, if not in the whole of Europe.

In the second part the author goes on to deal, separately, with the Holy Infirmary Dietary, and the Holy Infirmary Plate, and gives to the reader an entertaining description with all the *minutiae* which only extensive and patient studies can reveal.

It is understood that it is the author's intention to deal in a future publication with other activities of the Holy Infirmary, as soon as his further enquiries are brought to fruition. Those who are interested in the glorious past of this 'little Island with a great history' are indebted to Dr. Critien for his valuable work. He has already delved into our past history in two notable contributions. In the brochure "The Manderaggio", published in 1938, he has given us a faithful and interesting description of our main slum area, and in the other brochure "A Convent and a Hospital of the Past" published in 1940, he has traced the history of the Convent of St. Mary Magdalen's founded by Grand Master Verdalle towards the close of the sixteenth cen-

THE HOLY INFIRMARY

By the time one has walked round the building used until recently as Police Headquarters, in Valletta, he will have covered almost one third of a mile along six different streets, and may have noticed at one of its corners a marble tablet reminding him that this irregularly six-sided block was once the Infirmary of the Order (1).

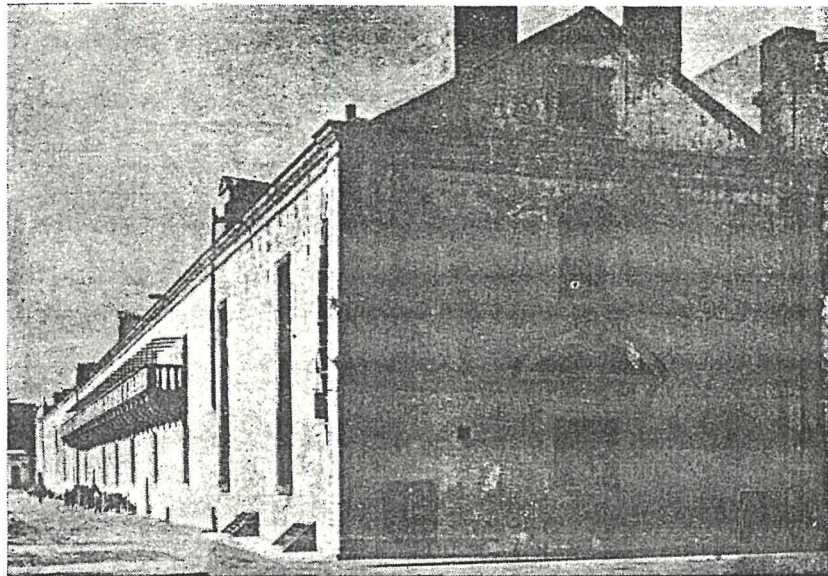
While, in fact, there is very little in the exterior of this building to remind the casual passer-by of the mission it had fulfilled for over two centuries, the stateliness and beauty of many other buildings testifying to the prowess of the Knights Hospitallers as defenders of the Faith and to their artistic taste as princely rulers have done much to divert public interest from this stone symbol of the "hospitality" which every member of the Order on his profession had solemnly undertaken to practice.

This undertaking was not restricted to the provision of treatment for male civilians in the same premises and on practically the same footing as members of the Order, but covered a number of well conceived and systematic "charities" for the treatment and relief of sickness amongst the rest of the population; (2) "charities" which the Order

(1) The tablet, put up when Sir Harry Luke was here as Lieutenant Governor, is inscribed as follows:— "This building was formerly the Sacred Infirmary or Hospital of the Order. It was built by Grand Master Jean L-Evesque de la Cassiere, in 1574, and enlarged by Grand Master Cardinal Hugues Loubenx de Verdale, in 1583. The main ward, which is now 505 feet long, was extended by Grand Masters Raphael and Nicholas Cotoner between 1660 and 1666".

(2) According to de Moulin's Statutes (1181), women as well as men were in his time eligible for treatment in the Order's Infirmary. Besides the hospitalization of the sick, the Order's conception of hospitality found practical expression here in many other directions, such as the sheltering and relief of the old and infirm, the mothering and upbringing of illegitimate and orphaned children, the subvention of the crippled, the blind and the leprous, the feeding of the poor, the rescue of fallen women and the provision of refuge for the repentant.

The Holy Infirmary as seen from the St. Lazarus Bastion, at the time when it was used as Garrison Hospital. The picture shows most of the St. Lazarus Curtain and part of Sda. Tramontana Infirmary frontages — practically the outer limits of the famous Long Ward. Before that time, no balcony was there and no glazed-ware pipes and the window openings came down to half their present length, also the *Porta Maggiore* had not been disfigured into a make shift window.



had initiated or which, if provided by other religious or lay bodies or persons, it subsidized or officially encouraged.

No better insight can be had of the charitable activities of the Order than by adverting to Grand Master Lastig's statement, made at the General Chapter of 1445, when its mission was forcefully summed up in these words "all our Brotherhood possesses does not belong to us, but to the sick, the weak and the infirm".

In the management of all its internal affairs, this semi-monastic Brotherhood was guided by its "Statutes" drawn up by the General Chapter, of which the Master of the Holy Infirmary was the president and in many ways the arbiter. (3).

Whenever it was found necessary to make new statutory provisions or to ratify amendments made when the General

Indeed, it would seem that the Order, by extending the sphere of its works of mercy, was trying to make amends for its gradual encroachment on the privileges and municipal liberties hitherto enjoyed by the Maltese and for the establishment of autocratic control over all the internal affairs of these Islands.

When the Order had to withdraw from these Islands, in 1798, the French found that it had been spending about 179580 *scudi* a year for the up-keep of two Hospitals, a Home for the Aged and Infirm and two Houses for Illegitimate Children, and 33075 *scudi* on out-door relief to the sick poor; besides 11352 *scudi* from private bequests and from Customs and Insurance Dues ear-marked for the same purpose. The only Pious Foundation in favour of the Holy Infirmary did not yield more than 83.8.0 *scudi* a year.

(3) It would appear that the first Statutes—the "*Rubriche della Regola dei Fratelli dell'Ospedale*"—were prepared by Raymond du Puys himself, the second Master of the Infirmary, 1120-1160, "*qui primus.....ordinavit et condidit Regula et Statuta*" and that he had them confirmed by Pope Eugene III, the Blessed Bernardo Pignatelli. (R.M.L. 1649—Collezione Di Statuti, etc.). When the Knights Hospitallers had to abandon Acre for Cyprus, however, the Papal Bull was destroyed by fire, but a copy of the Statutes was saved which Master Guillaume de Villaret (1300-1307) resubmitted for confirmation, this time to Pope Boniface, who availed himself of the occasion to make some alterations in the text.

Chapter was not in session, this supreme Council was convened to revise and re-enact the Statutes. In this way the Order came to possess a homogeneous and univocal set of rules or "**stabilimenti**" for the conduct of its members at all stages of their life and in any military or ecclesiastical office they might have to fill during their many-sided career.

As the number of the "**stabilimenti**" increased, they were grouped for convenience into sections or "**titoli**", according to subject. Thus we find the section on "Hospitality" immediately after that on the "Religious Duties of Brethren" and preceding that dealing with the purely worldly concerns of the Order:— its private revenues, derived from the many landed estates or commanderies scattered all over Europe, hitherto owned by its members, and from the accession, transfer, death and other duties they had to pay into the Common Coffers — "**Il Commun Tesoro**".

* * *

Of the twofold mission the Brotherhood undertook to accomplish — hospitality and armed resistance to the Moslem menace — warring naturally appealed more strongly to its youthful Novices, because more consistent with the upbringing and temperament of the greater number; so that the pre-eminence of the first over the second had to be stressed and given pride of place to on every occasion, in the Statutes and in all other official pronouncements (4). In point of fact, the head of the Brotherhood was first the "Custodian of the poor of Christ and Master of the Hospital of Jerusalem" before he was styled the "Most Excellent

(4) "All those who wish to dedicate themselves to the Service of the Sick and to the defence of the Catholic Faith, by becoming regular members of our Order"" (R.M.L. Ms. 333, Sectoin 2, para. 1). "Amongst Christians it is unanimously held that, of all humanitarian and charitable undertakings, hospitality holds pride of place as that which embraces them all." (Ibid. Sect. 4, para. 1). "Whatever the Order possesses has been the generous gift of pious and devout people purposely to defray the cost of hospitality and to wage war against the enemies of Christ". (Ibid. Sect. 5, para. 1).

and the Most Reverend Grand Master'', and the highest office of the Order was that of Grand Hospitaller.

Hence, wherever the fortunes of war compelled them to go, from Jerusalem to Acre, Cyprus and Rhodes, the first concern of the Convent was to build an Infirmary. (5).

The transfer of the Convent — the Order's Headquarters — from the Borgo across the Grand Harbour to Valletta, in 1571, was considered by the majority of Grand Master Del Monte's entourage as very premature and was more or less openly opposed, because of the as yet precarious accommodation for residential as well as administrative purposes in the "New Town", where many capital buildings were still unfinished or not even laid out. (6) Thus the construction

(5) The uncertainty of the Convent's stay at Viterbo, whence after more peregrinations it was eventually transferred to Malta, must have discouraged the building of proper hospitals, so that "hospitality" had to be limited to the care of the sick at their homes or as out patients at improvised infirmaries. Fedeli, (*"L'Ordine di Malta etc."* Forlì, 1913) in fact, limits himself to the statement that at Viterbo the Order made provision for the domiciliary treatment of the sick and for the foundation of an Infirmary. But E. Erskine Hume (*Medical Work of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem*, Baltimore, 1940) states that the Order "opened a hospital in Civitavecchia (1523) and established a more pretentious institution in Viterbo. (1527).

(6) The formal laying of the foundation stone of the New Town by La Vallette took place on Thursday, 28th March, 1566, at 42 min. before midday, according to Giov. Antonio Inferri's observations, a "mathematician" from Syracuse who was present with his astrolabe. The stone was laid **most** probably somewhere under the wall of St. John's Cavalier — *il Baluardo di San Giovanni Battista*—together with a lead casket containing gold, silver and bronze coins and a number of emblematic medals specially struck by Simon Prevost, the Flemish Master of the Order's Mint. One of the medals bore the motto "*Melita Renascens*". Of the four engineers to whom the task of planning the new Fortress Town had been committed —Baldassare Lanci from Urbino, the brothers Balthazar and Bartolomeo Gonza and Francesco Laparelli from Cortona, only Laparelli was present at the foundation ceremony — a

of the Magisterial Palace could not be taken in hand before 1572, and St. John's, the major church of the Convent, was not ready for consecration until February, 1578. So that when Del Monte died, in 1572, he had to be buried in the little church near St. John's Cavalier, which Jean de La Vallette had built, before everything else, on the crest of the Sceb-er-ras promontory, to hallow and prosper the construction of the new Seat of the Order. (7).

magnificent array of the highest officials of all branches of the Order. Laparelli's were the plans that had been finally approved, and as a public recognition of his services the Grand Master, after embracing him, hung round his neck a gold chain and medal with his own effigy in relief. (Bosio).

(7) This church was soon to take the place of the Convent's Parish Church in the Borgo, and, like it, it was also dedicated to St. Anthony Abbot and St. Anthony of Padua. But it was only in 1617 that the pictures of the two Saints were solemnly conveyed from the Borgo Church to St. John's, and thence to the little Church near St. John's Cavalier. A memorable occasion, because the Grand Master, Alofius de Wignacout, chose it also to make a present to the new Parish Church of a very old and miraculous image of the Holy Virgin, painted on wood, which Michael Ralli, a nobleman from Constantinople, had given him when on a visit to this Island. The picture, showing the Holy Virgin's head in a silver mount, was placed over the main Altar, where it can still be seen, the object of popular veneration. This, together with the yearly procession of the Convent to their Parish Church on the recurrence of the feast of the Holy Virgin's Nativity, in commemoration and thanksgiving for their victory over the Turks, explains why the church came also to be known as the Church *della Beata Vergine della Vittoria*. In all the official records of the Order, in fact, it is referred to as *la Chiesa di Sant' Antonio volgarmente detta della Vittoria*. (R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 1753.L.IV p. 234). It was the Church where all children born of Mahommedan parents were christened, and, in its *Liber Bapthismaton* of which the first entry bears the date 23rd July, 1617, the Parish Priest called himself *Parochus huius Parochiae Sancti Anthoni Abbatis et intra caeteris Sanctae Mariae de Victoria*.

And it is by the antonym "*Il-Vitorja*" that this church has been known ever since. Perhaps, the straightforward dedication to "Our Lady of Victories" of the church built in Rhodes, in 1480, in circumstances identical to those of 1565 in Malta,

Although labour shortage and scarcity of materials must have been still bad enough to discourage large scale undertakings of any sort, it was decided in November, 1574, to start work on the Valletta Infirmary. (8) Evidently de la Cassiere, del Monte's successor, and his General Chapter felt they could no longer delay building a new hospital. The conditions prevailing in the Borgo Infirmary were, in fact, far from satisfactory, owing mainly to the insufficient accommodation it provided, though this had already been increased in 1538, only a few years after its completion. Also, now that the various offices of the Order were being moved to the "New Town", that Infirmary had come to be inconveniently situated for all administrative and other purposes.

The Infirmary was opened in 1578. (9) Some say it was already being used for patients in 1573. (10) However restricted the area covered by the original building and unpretentious its architecture, (11) it could not have been completed within only two years of its inception. The anxious speed at which the construction of this Mediterranean Fortress was being pushed must have been seriously slowed by an unprecedented demand for stores of all sorts and for skilled and unskilled labour. It was the labour difficulty, in fact, that compelled the Grand Master and his Council, in

showed in Grand Master D'Aubusson a better understanding of the desire of his followers to keep alive in this way the memory of their triumph over the enemies of their Faith, "*in perpetuum monumentum liberationis civitatis Rhodi ab obsidione Thurcorum*". (R.M.L. Liber Bullarum 31).

(8) R.M.L. Arch of the Order 290.

(9) Zwehl. "Information about the care of the Poor and the Sick of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem". Rome 1915.

(10) Bedford. "The Regulations of the Old Hospital of the Knights" Blackwood & Sons, 1882.

(11) The building very probably was planned by, and constructed under the direction of Girolamo Cassar, the Architect of the Order, who built also the Auberges, of which the Infirmary reproduced the severe features before the subsequent architectural embellishment of their facades.

September 1573, to make it a punishable offence for any member of the Order to dare on his sole authority employ any master mason or mason or any "**picconiere, priatore, manuale et burdonari**" without the consent of the **Commisario Generale** in charge of Works.

Proof that, even in 1578, the hospital building was in parts still unfinished, is furnished by the decision of the General Chapter, in July, 1583, "that the building of the new Infirmary be speeded up and completed and that a Chapel be made in it, with its Cemetery to bury the poor that die in the Infirmary." (12).

Until this was done, civilians dying in the Infirmary were being buried in the Church of **Sta. Maria di Porto Salvo**, not far away; but members of the Order were, and continued to be interred in one of the two Conventual Churches, either in St. John's or in St. Anthony Abbot, the Convent's Parish Church, according to rank.

How long it took to give effect to the Chapter's decision that the Infirmary should have its own cemetery, I have not been able to find. But, as the land between Sda. Mercanti and the St. Lazarus Bastion, which came soon to be separated from the Infirmary by the formation of Sda. Tramontana in accordance with the Town's lay out, was as yet unbuilt, a likely plot may have been ear-marked there and enclosed to serve as a burial ground even before the Hospital was ready for the admission of patients. It was there, in fact, that the Cemetery was situated, just across the road, so to say, and it cannot have taken many months to be made ready for use. (13).

As to an Infirmary Chapel, one was built within or

(12) R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 291 p. 45.

(13) Abela, writing in 1647, informs that the Cemetery was quite close to the Infirmary and that it adjoined and was accessible from the church built by Fra. Giorgio Nibbia; and that behind the Cemetery, in front of the Magdalens' Convent, there was the Hospital for Women known as the *Casetta delle Donne*, to distinguish it from the Infirmary, which was the Men's Hospital. Abela L. 1. para. XXIV.

quite close to the Cemetery enclosure, but after some years and not from Treasury funds. (14)

This Chapel, dedicated to "Our Lady of Mercy," was erected in 1612 by Fra Giorgio Nibbia, (15) expressly for the Infirmary dead and the celebration of masses for the repose of their souls. It stood at the corner of the Cemetery nearest to the Infirmary. What remained of the site adjoining the Cemetery was soon built over; and it is interesting to find that several tenements in Sda. Tramontana, opposite the Infirmary, belonged to the Nibbia Foundation (16), and that

(14) Zwehl states that "the first Chapel and the Cemetery were added to the Infirmary in 1583". This may be true of the Cemetery; but so far no records have been met with of a chapel having been built in or near the Infirmary, until we come to the Nibbia Chapel which he states was constructed in 1612. Whether there had been another chapel before Nibbia's is a point worth clearing up; until then one is justified in assuming that Nibbia's was the first.

(15) Fra Giorgio Nibbia, who belonged to a very noble family of Novara, came to Malta in 1574 and died here in 1619. His epitaph in the Nibbia Chapel, where he was laid to rest, speaks of his liberality towards the poor and of his devoted services to the patients in the Holy Infirmary, where he nursed the sick and helped to bury the dead.

(16) According to a Treasury "Collection of Rent Book" (R.M.L. Arch of the Order 246) the immovables belonging to Fr. Giorgio Nibbia's Foundation in this part of Valletta were 7 tenements in Sda. Tramontana, of which 2 were one-roomed, let at sc. 236 a year, and 1 in Sda. Ospedale let on a 99 years lease at sc. 43 a year.

But the Foundation included also immovables near the Auberge d'Italie as well as one fifth of Fra Giorgio's *spoglio* and several sums of money owing to him, as described in Notary Vincella's deed of the 8th July, 1619.

Fra Giorgio made this foundation to provide for the upkeep of his Chapel and for the celebration of masses for the Infirmary dead.

Not long after, the Administrators of the Foundation formed the "Confraternity of Our Lady of Mercy", the members of which had the right to be buried in the Chapel. But Infirmary

in 1643, one of the houses facing Sda. Mercanti was made into a "Home for Female Incurables". (17).

* * *

The burial of the dead not being one of the Infirmary functions to which one need revert later, occasion is taken now to say something about the Cemetery and its fortunes.

The Cemetery is said to have been a few feet above the level of the ground adjoining it and large enough to allow of more than 360 burials. (18) As the dead, however, were buried in common graves and there was no prescribed time after which they could be exhumed, it is not possible to form an idea of its extent. It must have been a smallish place, in any case, but the number of interments run into tens of thousands.

A central path, in line with the entrance, divided the Cemetery longitudinally. On one side there was a strip of ground reserved for young children and on the other a few steps led to an underground ossuary where, besides heaps of odd bones, whole skeletons were lined against the walls.

patients who, not being members, could pay sc. 3.6.0. in a lump sum enjoyed the same privilege.

Nibbia had his Chapel affiliated to St. John's, the Major Church of the Convent, so as to prevent the Prior and Cappellani of the Infirmary from interfering with the management of the Chapel and the affairs of the Confraternity; but they had several squabbles, all the same.

(17) This was Caterina Scappi's *Hospitalis Mulierum Invalidarum*, better known as the *Casetta*. In 1730, the *Procuratori* of the *Casetta*, in order to be able to have accommodation for more patients, acquired some of the houses belonging to the Nibbia Foundation as well as the site then occupied by the Chapel and its Sacristy. It would appear that the Administrators of the Foundation had long intended to enlarge the Chapel; and this explains one of the conditions of the sale by which the *Procuratori* of the *Casetta* were to pull down the Chapel and Sacristy at their own expense and remove the stone blocks to a site close by. The new Nibbia Chapel was built in quite a short time and was blessed by the Bishop, Fra. Paul Alpheran de Bussan, in August, 1731. (R.M.L. Arch. 636 & Ms. 20).

(18) R.M.L. 142/6.

The Cemetery ground must have been used with great parsimony, as it was not before a couple of centuries that the Infirmary officials and the people living near realized that it was no longer performing effectively its duty of mineralizing organic matter and that, for that reason, disease might break out due to air pollution, “*possa scoppiar qualche infezione di aria*”.

But the Cemetery is sure to have proved an intolerable nuisance long before that (19) though it was only in 1776 that Rohan's General Chapter ordered the **Procuratori** of the Treasury to provide a more suitable cemetery out of Valletta, (20) and the Venerable Sixteen must have used very strong language **in camera**, because within two years (24.4.1778) the Grand Master was told that the new Cemetery was ready.

What is left of the old Cemetery, after the extensive reconstructions carried out in that part of Valletta during the last hundred years and after it was blitzed out of recognition in the early months of 1942, is a small area behind the ruins of the School of Anatomy, with a few weather beaten and splintered memorial slabs lying here and there near a boundary wall, to which they had stuck for ages held by an inch of mortar and by the peace of God.

*

*

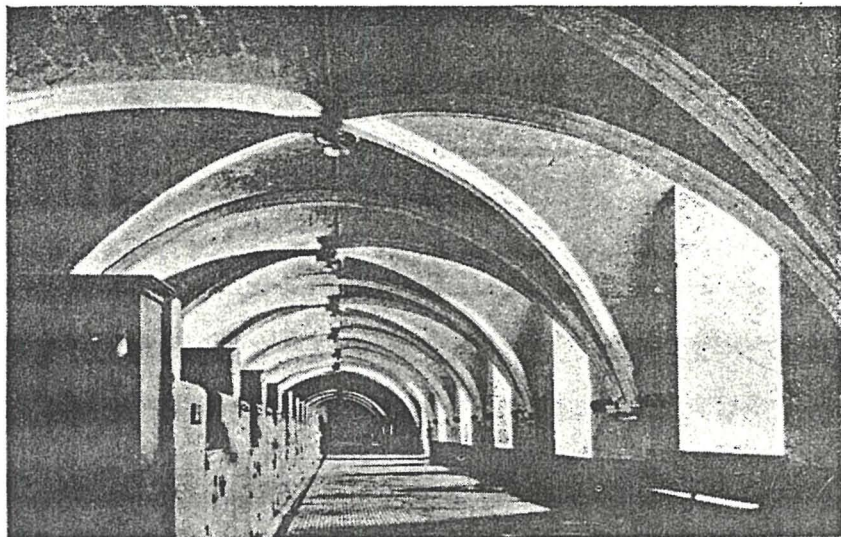
*

Between 1583 and 1593 much needed additional or improved accommodation was provided in the Infirmary, as besides a separate ward for incurable cases the list of new buildings included a dispensary with sleeping quarters for the “*Aromatario*” (1587), new quarters for the Infirmary (1593) as well as rooms for the washing of patients' clothes and hospital linen and for the storage of same.

(19) In 1680, owing to an unusually large mortality from “*malignant fevers*”, the Cemetery proved too small. Many bodies had to be left unburied because previous burials could not dissolve quickly enough, although quick lime was used: one *tumulo* to each burial. (R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 646).

(20) R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 309.

The Maggazzino Ward with its beautiful groined stone ceiling. Very probably it was when the Infirmary came to be used as a Garrison Hospital that the sills of the windows were chanfreed down to a few feet from the level of the floor to improve natural lighting. The horse stalls along the other side of the Ward were built after that, for the Police mounts.



This closes the first growing stage of the "Palace of the Holy Infirmary", as the Hospital of the Order was styled in the minutes of the Council.

Between this and the second stage no important additions or structural improvements appear to have been made, except that in August, 1651, Fr. Nicolas de Culans St. Ouen, the then Infirmary, (21) submitted to the Grand Master and Council that he had managed to turn a patch of useless rocky ground into a garden for convalecents; which, besides the 300 *scudi* he had already spent, would cost him another 100 to complete. For having in this way added to the amenities of the Infirmary, Fr. Nicolas asked to be allowed to go on using this garden for ten years after the expiration of his term of office. It is not possible now to identify the whereabouts of this garden.

*

*

*

The second stage of the Infirmary's growth began in 1635, when Fr. Carlo Cauchon d'Anise, the Infirmary, represented to the General Chapter that the "**Sala della Infermeria**" had become too small for their needs. The Council ordered the Procurator of the **Commun Tesoro** and the Hospitaller to meet on the spot and find out how much it would cost to enlarge it. (22) But it took over four years for things to advance a step further, as it was in December, 1639, that the Council was roused again to the necessity of enlarging the Infirmary, "**ad dominorum aegrotorum commodum**", when it appointed a Commission of Four to go fully into the matter and prepare a scheme with plans and models.

In less than a month the Commission was ready with its report, which the Council adopted in February, 1660, **ab incarnatione**: all immovables that were in the way of the proposed extension were to be bought out and demolished, and the cost of expropriation met entirely out of the moneys derived from the sale of prizes captured by the Fleet of the Order — **praedae triremium**. But the money for building was to be found by the **Commun Tesoro**. The first

(21) R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 117. p. 125.

(22) R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 119.

stone of the extension was laid by Grand Master Raphael Cotoner in June, 1662, and the extension was completed in July, 1666, under Grand Master Nicholas Cotoner, his brother.

The outstanding feature of the second stage was the prolongation of the front and largest of the two original wards towards the Post of Castille and Portugal — **versus Venerandae Linguae Castellae et Portugalliae propugnaculum** — better known to us as the Lower Barracca, resulting in the formation of a ward, ceiled at a height of $30\frac{1}{2}$ ft. under one single roof and measuring 503 ft. \times 34 ft. 10 ins., the world famous Hall of the Holy Infirmary. As if to mark off the old ward from its extension, the altar existing against the wall of the extended end was left standing (23).

In this way the Infirmary came to have three instead of two main wards, all at the same level and opening one into another, arranged like a Roman *T*, of which the horizontal bar would represent the old ward overlooking the Grand Harbour as now extended to more than double its original length, and the vertical the smaller ward — the **Saletta** — at right angles to it.

It can safely be assumed that the scheme included also the extension of the room under the front ward known as the **Magazzino** originally intended, as its name clearly shows, for the storage of hospital equipment, etc. On its St. Lazarus Curtain side, the **Magazzino** was cut in the rock; but the rest was above ground level, so that on one side at least it had doors and windows on to the yard space at its

(23) Rather than move the altar that was at the end of the Old Ward, another was built with its back to it so that it faced the extension. In this way patients in the *Saletta*, the Ward at right angles to the Old Ward, could still assist at the celebration of Mass, as well as the patients now warded in the extension. During the week, Mass was said at one of the altars in turn, on alternate days, and at the two altars on Sundays and holidays of obligation.

It was at this time also that the Treasury allowed the windows of the Infirmary's quarters, hitherto fitted with waxed linen, to be glazed, on condition that his—the French—Langue should bear all relative expenses, present and future. (R.M.L. Liber. Decret. 645 p. 77).

back later known as the Lower Court. The "**Magazzino**", now made of the same size and shape as the extended ward over it, was put to several important uses, for which, however, it was quite unsuited. Thus part of it, some 380 ft. long, was walled off to serve as a ward for the treatment of **bonavogli**, civilian prisoners and privately owned slaves, and known as the Magazzino Ward—"la Sala del **Magazzino**"; its end section, towards Sda. Pozzi, was used for the reception of foundlings and the rest became the Infirmary Kitchen, which was still there in 1786, when Howard described it as "darker and more offensive than the rest of that part of the Infirmary".

But it was not long before the need was felt of better storage room for mattresses, so that they would not be ruined by damp, and of more ward space for surgical patients, the two rooms set apart for wounded members of the Order, "**li Cavalieri feriti**", having proved to be too small. This was in 1669, when two more "**magazzini**" were built to store perishable hospital equipment and six additional small rooms for the wounded, much better situated than the existing ones—"in un sito a questo fine molto opportuno."

From now on, no building operations of any importance appear to have been carried out until the early years of 1700, when the last free stretch of the Infirmary's perimeter, a gap on its Sda. Mercanti alignment, was built up.

To what extent previous expansion had encroached upon this frontage one cannot say with certainty. That the Sda. Ospedale side of the Infirmary, however, had already grown to, and some way round its Sda. Mercanti corner, before that time, may be reasonably inferred from the recommendation made, as early as 1679, by the **Commissarii Visitatori** of the Infirmary, that only the entrance opposite the **Camerata** be thenceforth used for the admission of patients. (24)

(24) R.M.L. Arch of the Order 262. Until then patients had been admitted by the *Porta Maggiore* in Sda. Tramontana. One may still see the jambs and lintel of the Sda. Mercanti entrance, now walled up to a certain height and fitted with a heavy iron grating above that.

The Sda. Mercanti front was completed in 1712, under Grand Master Perellos, and the open space at its back being now enclosed by buildings on all sides became the Upper Court or Quadrangle of the Infirmary. A fountain bearing Perellos' arms carved in stone was erected at the centre of this Court, testifying to the active interest displayed by the Grand Master in this last stage of the Infirmary's growth. The Grand Master took this occasion to show also his interest in the spiritual welfare of the sick, and did so munificently by constructing at his expense a Chapel at the angle of the **Saletta** with the **Sala Vecchia** and accessible directly from the former. A dedicatory inscription: "**Sacramentorum Sacramentohonorificentius servando**", dated 1712, was placed on the left hand side wall of the Chapel. (25)

When the gap on the Sda. Mercanti front was built over, the whole site on which the Infirmary had been leisurely expanding for the last hundred years or so came to be used up. One cannot expect these extensions, made at more or less long intervals and concerned as they were with satisfying the needs that at the time were most pressing, to have followed any set plan. Also the lie and configuration of the ground must have proved a very disturbing factor in deciding where and how best to provide the required additional accommodation. As a result of these piece-meal accretions, important services came to be dislocated and apartments as well as sick-rooms added that were inconveniently situated in respect of other similar existing accommodation. In this way the Infirmary building grew into a straggling whole, too unwieldy for satisfactory and easy administration and supervision, both from the domestic and the medical standpoint.

(25) Perellos built this Chapel, which he dedicated to the Most Holy Virgin, to provide a place where the Holy Eucharist could be "more honourably preserved, for the salvation of the sick". Until then the Blessed Sacrament had been kept in the Altar of the Most Holy Trinity, in the ward adjoining. The Chapel was blessed in December, 1712, and the Blessed Sacrament transferred to the new tabernacle in February, 1712, *ab incarnatione* (R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 262).

It would appear that, in 1660-1662, just enough ground was cleared by expropriation and demolition to allow of the old front ward being made of the length required and no more; so that, when completed, the extended ward came to butt against private buildings at the corner of Sda. S. Nicola and Sda. Pozzi. This, besides spoiling the aspect of the Infirmary along the Curtain, prevented openings being formed for the admission of air and light into the terminal section of the extended ward. The obvious remedy would have been to buy and pull down the obstructing property when the extension was built. Instead, we find the Treasury, more than a hundred years after, paying 1854 **scudi** to annex it and use it for the treatment of luetic patients.

But, though one cannot help admitting as justified the animadversions, some of them very scathing, on the Infirmary building, the Order cannot be blamed for having been unaware of, or indifferent to its faults, and the Order's concern in that respect is shown by the fact that, in 1776, the construction of an entirely new Infirmary on a site more suitable in every way was advocated by the French Langue. The French Knights, who had a statutory right to the highest office in that institution, felt, no doubt, they were more directly responsible for its repute and for the quality of the "hospitality" it supplied. The ever mounting general expenditure, however, and the financial embarrassment of the Treasury over the incorporation of the Antonine Order, in 1777, which committed the Order of St. John to the yearly average payment of some 73,300 **scudi** for ten years, must have discouraged serious consideration of any scheme for the building of a new hospital.

* * *

The Infirmary site, its orientation and the lighting and ventilation of its principal wards have in turn been the subject of much unfavourable comment.

The suitability of the site could reasonably be defended on the ground of its easy reach from Fort St. Elmo and the Grand Harbour. As the former was meant to be made, by

an extensive system of defensive works, into a most formidable stronghold against attack from the sea, and Galley Creek — the **Porto delle Galere** — in the Grand Harbour offered the safest anchorage to the ships of the Order returning from their frequent scraps with enemy naval ships and privateers or from their more or less unprovoked incursions on Eastern shores, the nearness of the Infirmary meant quicker removal to hospital of the wounded and the sick.

Access to the Infirmary from the Harbour side appears, in fact, to have been made more expeditious by means of a short cut leading up to it from somewhere near the Old Barriera. Also, as it happened, the vicinity of the sea provided an easy way of disposing of the excretal and other liquid Infirmary refuse, through cuttings and faults in its rocky foundations: an easy but very primitive and objectionable solution of what is often a major problem of sanitary engineering. (26)

As to the outlook of the Infirmary, the architect who planned the original building may have been compelled by the lie of the ground, which sloped rather sharply from Sda. Mercanti to the St. Lazarus Curtain, to have its main ward facing south-east, notwithstanding that it would thus be fully exposed to the sultry moist scirocco winds so prevalent here in the late summer and autumn.

(26) It would appear that in the rock, under some part of the hospital building, a regular trench or culvert had been formed for the discharge of excretal refuse, which explains the weekly issue of oil for lighting the culverts: "*per le mine ove si buttano gli escrementi: 15 misure di olio ogni Sabato*". (R.M.L. Ms. 646). This must have been the "underground space" mentioned by Robert, Vaubois' Principal Medical Officer, in 1798, "where dirt and filth were discharged, which thence run into the sea, so that there were no bad smells"; a statement very much open to question. Bedford speaks of a "vaulted passage", portion of which was brought to light in 1881, during sewerage excavations, which seems to have been a communication of the Infirmary with the sea. (Bedford. "Old Hospital of the Knights", Blackwood & Sons, 1882 p. IX).

Built, as they were, with windows too high above floor level and some of them with floors below the level of the surrounding ground or of internal yards, the main wards of the Holy Infirmary did not possess conditions favouring natural lighting and ventilation and must have been dark during the best part of the day and stuffy, if not ill smelling, at all times. Hence the need of two oil lamps during the rounds of both Physicians and Surgeons and the strict injunctions to ward servants to make sure they had on charge the regulation brass candlestick and ward lanterns. This explains, also, the morning and evening fumigations of wards with rosemary sprigs and the boiling of vinegar in open pans at night, during meals and during the doctors' rounds. No doubt the primitive sanitary arrangements added to the fouling of the air in the wards, notwithstanding all the directions the **Prodomi** were expected to give to prevent the privies cut in the thickness of walls becoming a source of nuisance.

*

*

*

By the time the Infirmary had ceased to grow it came to have an irregularly hexagonal shape, and covered an area of a little over two acres. Architecturally its most incongruous growth took place at the time of the two Coloners, when its main ward, which until then had made up the whole front of the original building, was prolonged in the direction of the Lower Barracca.

About one-fourth of the said area was taken up by three internal yards which followed the outline of the buildings enclosing them. Thus a bird's-eye view would show the Infirmary as if made of three sections, each with an open space in the middle: two rectangular and one triangular, but much smaller, in between.

As already stated, the lower section facing the Grand Harbour over the St. Lazarus Curtain, which for that reason was known also as the Infirmary Curtain — "**la Cortina dell'Infermeria**" — was built first and, after the extension of its front ward, was able to accommodate the greater number of hospital patients. The upper section, namely

that facing the **Camerata** (27) in Sda. Mercanti, came into being last, but part at a time. So that it already had a door on Sda. Mercanti, close to Sda. Ospedale corner, before the rest of the Sda. Mercanti front was built. This section when completed began to be known as the **Infermeria Nuova**; but it was really the most recently built part of the Infirmary and not a new Infirmary.

The yard belonging to the lower section measured 134 ft. \times 82 ft. and was known as the **Cortile di Basso** — the Lower Court or Quadrangle — because 34 ft. below the level of the Upper Court, the yard of the Sda. Mercanti section, which measured 90 ft. \times 90 ft.

As Sda. Mercanti runs at an angle of some 45° to Sda. Irlandese — the street skirting the St. Lazarus Curtain — the corresponding Infirmary sections came to be separated by a triangular gap which they both encroached upon but did not entirely fill; hence the formation of an intermediate triangular Court, about 370 sq. yards in area.

Some of the Infirmary plans are apt to give one the impression that the "intermediate" and the Sda. Mercanti sections were the consecutive though much protracted execution of a whole length and well matured scheme of hospital extension. There seem to be no records in support of this view and, as already stated, the awkward distribution of much of the accommodation contained in these sections points more to extemporized additions than to a set and comprehensive building scheme.

The remark that the extreme south-east end of Valletta was not the right place for a hospital is not, as explained before, a fair appreciation of the circumstances by which, in 1574, the Order was guided in its selection, and should be dismissed. Not so the statement that the Infirmary was the

(27) The **Camerata** was built in 1573, under Verdalle, and was used for several purposes before it was turned into the Infirmary laundry and linen store, in 1779, at the cost of sc. 7225.5.17. Until then these offices formed part of the Infirmary proper. See: *Bilancio Decennale del Commun Tesoro*, 1787.

most complicated and ill-arranged building in existence. (28) And it is this fact, which cannot be contraverted, that makes one shy of attempting anything but a general description of the accommodation it provided; the more so as there seem to be no contemporary plans that might help identify and explain the use of its various offices and apartments.

The plans available contain no explanatory notes, and were prepared long after the Infirmary had ceased to be the Hospital of the Knights. Since then, the French used it, for two years, and after them the English for many years, as a Military Hospital; and they in turn carried out extensive structural alterations to make it suit their requirements and conform as much as possible to their ideas of hospital construction and sanitation. After that and until the present War broke out, the Infirmary building has been the Police Dépôt, which made it necessary to use some of the wards as stables and garages, to do away with the ornamental well in the Upper Court, to open or wall up rooms, to build or remove divisional walls. Axis bombs have damaged it since, irretrievably in places.

Now that the hope expressed by Bedford, in 1881, that the Holy Infirmary might be spared as "a relic of charitable magnificence" seems to have receded into the land of dreams, and fearing that post-war reconstruction may encroach further on its rightful claim to be preserved as much as possible intact, it may be found useful and timely to renew and perhaps improve our acquaintance with this stone testimony of the best traditions of the Order.

(28) "Barracks and Hospitals Commission, 1856" as quoted by Bedford, "this Hospital is one of the most complicated buildings we have seen, and one of the most ill-arranged and unsuitable places for the Sick of a Garrison in existence."

THE HOLY INFIRMARY FOOD

The list of food-stuffs from which the Infirmary Physicians and Surgeons were allowed to order what they considered best (1) for the patients under their care was sufficiently long and varied to remove any misgivings new admissions may have had on that score. The Order, in fact, spared no pains in providing the Infirmary with the best of everything. "The Infirmary" in the words of Chev. La Nouhe, who filled that office in 1643, "was entrusted and charged by all statutory laws and regulations to obtain for the sick the best and most excellent food."

As an incidental illustration of the above one may mention that Monsieur Dumont, who wrote an account of his visit to Malta in 1699 (2) went away with the impression that the Infirmary fare as well as the treatment were so good that there was hardly any Knight who objected to go in as a patient. And another "French Gentleman", anonymous this time, who prided himself "on seeing things that no others before him had noticed" was struck by the fact that more than 200 chickens a day were used to prepare soup for the patients and that, in one word, the food was so excellent that no patient, however rich and well looked after at home, could wish for anything better. Indeed we

(1) "Above everything else, the *Prodomi* see that every article used in the preparation of the Infirmary diets is of good quality, selecting always the best. Thus the sick are able to get excellent chicken broth and soups made with vegetables, vermicelli or rice, minced meat and every sort of meat ordered for them, such as chickens, pigeons, cockerels, beef, veal or game—made into hashes, fricassees, stews, rissoles—in the necessary quantities, besides milk of almonds, fresh eggs, prunes and raisins, and every kind of refreshment good for sick people, such as restoratives, sweet biscuits, apples and pomegranates with sugar, and other sorts of fruit preserves according to the requirements of each. Knights and persons of the Habit receive double portions." (*Notizie della Sacra Infermeria etc.*—Roma—Rocco Bernabò 1725).

(2) (R.M.L. BF. 1).

have it on record that, in 1685, the Infirmary were using as many as 1200 chickens and between 7 and 8 hundred cockerels and pigeons per week. (3). But the chickens, according to the anonymous writer, after being strained off the soup, were thrown away, "*on jette le reste*", a statement one could hardly expect the kitchen staff to bear out. (4)

No one who has had to cater for large Institutions, even if invested with powers as wide as the Infirmary's, would expect everything to go on smoothly always; nor would he be surprised at occasional complaints such as found utterance in the memorandum against de Loubenx Verdalle — the Cardinal Grandmaster — prepared for submission to Pope Sixtus V, Verdalle's great friend. This document was signed by the Knights and Bailiffs of the Spanish and Italian Langues, who, as it happened, had an axe to grind with Verdalle, mainly because he was yet another French Grandmaster. As to the Infirmary, they complained that the sick there "suffered in body and soul"; a very sweeping statement based, as regards the body, on the assertion that the Hospital apothecary was often short of drugs and these were of poor quality as a rule, and that the diet was unsuitable and not nourishing enough. As an instance of this, it was stated that, instead of chicken, patients were

(3) "*Nouvelle Relation du Voyage et Description exacte de l'Isle de Malte dans l-etat ou elle est a present et qui les auteurs qu'en ont ci-devant escrit n'ont jamais observe*". Paris, Chez Gervais Plonzier, 1679, R.M.L. Bn. 6.35.

(4) This had formed the substance of a complaint by the Infirmary fowl contractors, who stated that weekly requisitions on that scale—which they were bound to supply at contract prices, the lowest ever tendered—were not leaving them any profit, as birds were extremely scarce and none could be imported from Sicily. The Treasury asked the Infirmary *Prodomi* to report; who explained that they had to increase the rations very substantially, because patients admitted to the Infirmary on their return from long cruises developed enormous appetites. The Treasury took it on trust that it was so, and granted the contractors a 70 sc. bonus, warning them not to ask for more. R.M.L. Archives of the Order, Ms. 646, p. 570.

given goat-flesh which helped to polish them off: and this, by the way, shows that even then our goats came in for a good deal of abuse.

One must not forget, however, that the latter years of Verdalle's rule were years of acute distress, owing to famine and to a severe outbreak of plague, which must have made things most difficult for everybody and strained the resourceful ingenuity of the administrative heads of the Infirmary to breaking point. So that, without crediting the flesh of goats with any specific power to do harm, it is likely that most of the complaints about the Infirmary were not ill founded. This is probably why Verdalle, who took the trouble to contravert in writing, point by point, all the shortcomings for which the memorandum held him responsible, in dealing with the Infirmary screened himself generally behind the Infirmarian, stating that he was a trusted and competent administrator and was helped by the best Knights of his Langue, and left it at that. But he made the interesting though not entirely unexpected admission, which surely applied to many of his predecessors and successors as well, that he did not visit the Hospital regularly, but whenever he found it conveniently possible to do so. Verdalle, by the way, was known to be very fond of a game of cards.

*

*

*

The Order made it a point to see that all food prescribed for patients reached them unaltered both in quantity and quality. This control was exercised by the Infirmarian and by the Infirmary **Prodomi**, in the interest of the patients as well as of the **Procuratori** of the Treasury, who, as the officers entrusted with the placing of all important food and other contracts, were responsible to the Grandmaster and Council for the careful financing of the Order's foremost institution, the maintenance of which, as time went on, was proving to be an increasingly heavy burden.

Apparently the only outside fault-finding about the Infirmary food was Howard's, who, in 1786, during his three week's stay in these Islands was given free access to the

Order's hospitals and prisons. Howard, whose sweeping condemnation of the Infirmary is referred to elsewhere, (5) was a very meticulous critic and objected to the "sweet cakes" and to the sticky sweetmeats served to patients at meal time: probably, the *biscottini* and *amendolate*, made principally of sugar and ground almonds. Almonds are plentiful in Southern Europe, and are extensively used in the making of sweets and other dishes, restoratives and syrups, of which they form a very tasty if not highly nourishing ingredient. Evidently Howard did not have a sweet tooth, and would have done better if he had pulled the ears of the Grandmaster and Council for tolerating unwarranted discrimination between members of the Order, civilians and slaves, which went so far as to allow the first to have double rations in regard to important dietetic items, or to repeat some of the courses. (6)

This sort of partiality had reached a point at which the **Procuratori** of the Treasury must have felt it their duty to inform the Grand Master, as they did in 1757, complaining

(5) Howard: *An Account of the Principal Lazarettos of Europe*, 1789. Howard found fault with nearly every Hospital in Europe. At least our Infirmary escaped the obloquy of being bug-infested, unlike one of the Hospitals in London which Howard states had to pay a sum every year for the destruction of these insects.

(6) As to the quality and quantity of the bread, for example: that for civilian patients was for many years of a quality called *pane schiacciato* as distinguished from the *pane di semola*, the best, issued to members of the Order. It was only in 1679 that the Treasury ordered that all patients bedded in certain wards—"sala di sopra, sala dei feriti e sala dei flussuanti"—be given the same bread as the Knights but of less weight, 8 ounces instead of 10, and *pane schiacciato* to patients in the "Magazzino" ward and in the "Falanga" and to all Infirmary employees. This second quality bread was made of all the flour remaining after the separation of the semola, but without the addition of the offals: *granza* and *caniglia*. The *schiacciato* was also issued to civilian prisoners, crews of the galleys and galley slaves, but to crews and slaves with the *granza* added. (R.M.L. Decreti C. Tesoro. Arch. of the Order 646 and 262).

that the Military and Religious members of the Order, as well as certain distinguished foreigners, were put on a very expensive diet the very day they came in, in defiance of Infirmary rules and regulations. (7) And this can not have been the Treasury's first complaint.

That food was one of the heaviest items of Infirmary expenditure was admitted in so many words by the 1795 Commission — **la Commissione di Stato Economica** — in their report to the Grandmaster and Council, when they said that food was "**una delle principali spese**"; nor could they help laying emphasis on the fact that the cost to maintain the Hospital — "one of the two essential establishments of the Order" — had become unbearable. As a matter of fact the Infirmary food accounts had been giving the Treasury officials no peace of mind since a long time. According to the Auditors' Report on the **Bilancio Generale** of the Treasury for the financial year 1781—2, **scudi** 68361.9.13 had been spent for the treatment of 153333 patients during that year, each patient being reckoned to have cost **lari** 5.7 per day. (8) But even so, one can understand the agitation of the Treasury on finding that for the financial year 1796-7 the Infirmary was going to cost the Order 79,476 **sc.** as reckoned on the previous ten years' expenditure. This was about double what they had spent in 1679 and the fact that the number of patients treated had increased considerably, though not quite in the same proportion, was no consolation. The extent of the Treasury's financial straits may be judged by the decision that all the silver plate the

(7) On admission and before any doctor had seen them, these patients were issued with two chickens each, morning and evening, which very often they either sold or exchanged for other unsuitable and possibly harmful articles of food. All this was stopped:—no food to be given to new admissions before they had been seen by an Infirmary Physician, and the *Prodomi* to make sure that no one was admitted who was not really, but pretended to be ill. (R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 639).

(8) R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 273 p. 356.

Infirmary could do without was to be minted, (9) besides a quantity of the Grand Master's Palace silver and some of that belonging to the ward rooms of the ships of the Order. (10)

An instance of the Treasury's unremitting endeavours to cut down expenditure was the stoppage of the meat and wine issued daily to Gabriel Henin, the Senior Infirmiry Surgeon. (11) This was done on the advice of the said Economy Commission. Perhaps it was ~~was~~ also as a result of this Commission that the **Prodomi** were instructed that only the crust of bread was to be used for the patients' soups, the crumb to go to the **Aromatario** for his poultices. (R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 1714).

The need of retrenchment all round, in fact, had become most pressing during the second part of the 18th Century, when, owing to its increased commitments and the dwindling revenues from its Commanderies, the Order was at its wits' end how to find money to carry on the administration of these Islands.

The concern of the Treasury at the mounting cost of the

(9) R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 274. fol. 257.

(10) Of course the cost of living had increased considerably by that time. To mention only two items of the Infirmiry regimen: in 1669, chickens cost $4\frac{1}{2}$ *tari* each and cockerels 25 *grana* against 7 *tari* and 9 *grana* and 2 *tari* and 3 *grana* respectively in 1796, and the contract price of eggs rose from 2 *grana* and 2 *piccoli* each, in 1669, to nearly 4 *grana* each, in 1796. (R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 645 and 1716).

(11) Henin, an anatomist and surgeon of extra-insular repute, was the Senior Infirmiry Surgeon whom Grandmaster de Vilhena, in 1725, had made Prosector in our School of Anatomy at the Infirmiry. As such Henin had to hold classes of dissection in public and perform all post-mortem examinations. In the words of his famous successor, Michael Angelo Grima, Henin was "*primus ad incidenda mortuorum corpora et ad ejus partes publice ostendendas*", and for these extra duties had been granted 1 *rotolo* of meat and 2 *misure* of wine daily. He petitioned the Treasury against the Commission's recommendation, but to no avail. In 1778, however, Grima was allowed 10 *scudi* a month for the same duties, in addition to his monthly salary of *sc.* 29.20.

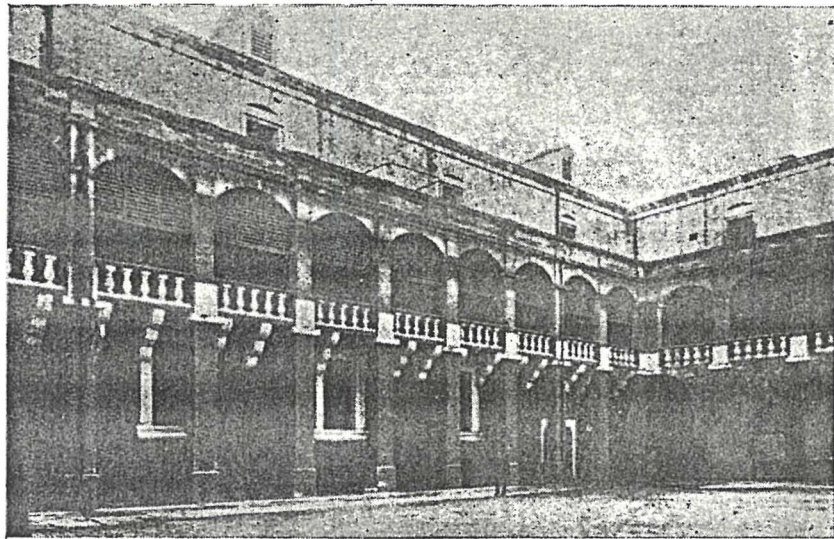
Infirmary food was reflected in the meticulous care of the Infirmary's administrative officers to prevent fraud, waste and improper use of food and every practice that by malice or neglect was likely to run counter to the interests of the Order or to interfere with the recovery of patients. This care is shown in one of its details by the regulation that goats and she-asses brought to be milked by the Contractor at one of the Infirmary doors, be not taken there at the same time; evidently to prevent goats' — the cheaper milk, — being passed off as asses'.

Of the articles forming the main items of the Infirmary diet, bread was normally supplied by contract. The wheat, which was imported by the **Università** on account of the Treasury mostly from Sicily, was also used to make the Infirmary's vermicelli. The oil came from the Order's vats; meat, poultry, wine, raisins and prunes were contracted for locally by the Treasury; but eggs and milk, besides such articles as were not largely used, were left for the **Infirmary Prodomi** to provide at rates approved by the Treasury. (12)

It would appear that patients on "ordinary" diet were each allowed daily 12 maltese ounces beef or 10 ozs. veal or one fourth of a chicken and 2 ozs. raisins cleared from stalk or 10 to 11 prunes according to size. The bread ration was 8 ozs. of white bread, except to patients in the **Magazzino Ward** and in the **Falanga** who were given an equal quantity of **pane schiacciato**, this being a flat and brownish loaf, because the semola had been removed from the flour

(12) The May, 1795, to April, 1796, Infirmary Accounts of food consumed by patients, probably the last existing record, show that bread, white and other, 360544 rations, cost in round figures sc. 10150; meat, 71411 rations, each one-third of a rotolo, sc. 7935; eggs, 88676 at 2 *tari* and 6 *grana* per dozen, sc. 1416; poultry, 5357 hens and 4403 cockerels, 24975 rations, sc. 4027; wine, 1015 barrels of 152 *terzi* each, one *terzo* per ration, sc. 3555; oil, 157 *caffisi*, sc. 1570; vermicelli, 124 *salme*, sc. 3368; raisins, 126308 rations of 2 ozs. each, 14 rations to the rotolo, sc. 1366; Total sc. 33384. (R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 1716). The *ratal* was then reckoned to weigh 30 Maltese ounces.

The Lower Court of the Infirmary, showing some of the windows of the *Magazzino* Ward and part of the graceful balustrated covered passage at the level of the *Sala della Infermeria* and the *Saletta* — practically all the original accommodation for patients made ready in 1574—to which it gave independent access.



but not some of the offals and, therefore, the dough did not rise. A number of extra loaves, however, were distributed in some of the wards: “*per la colatione*”. To Knights and other members of the Order a 10 ounce semola loaf was issued. As to the wine, it is not clear what a ration amounted to. In 1685, the daily wine consumption of the Infirmary was **66 misure**, of which 15 went to the five principal wards — **Sala Vecchia, Grande, Saletta, Sala Feriti e Nuova**,—and 2 to the **Sala del Magazzino**. (13) This wine, like the extra bread was served in time “for the morning meal”; so that there could not be much left for the afternoon. (14)

Eggs, milk, whey and perhaps chicken soup (15) were extras and formed very likely the main items of a “liquid” diet. Soups were either clear or with grated bread—8 ozs. of bread for every four portions—or with vermicelli or vegetables. But at the end of the principal meal **biscottini** were given round all the wards.

*

*

*

(13) The cook had 2 *misure* to stew the prunes in; and 21 *misure* were issued every Saturday “*per le messe*”.

(14) In the Infirmary, wine was given regularly for many unpaid, or extra, or unpleasant services; thus the Dominican Fathers who called to hear confessions had 2 *misure* each, and each of the four Infirmary *Cappellani di Ubbidienza* on duty a like quantity. The ward-servants whose turn it was to dig graves in the Infirmary Cemetery near by had 2 *misure* for every interment.

The Infirmary unit measure for wine was what they chose to call the *misura*; four *misure* being equal to one *quartuccio*, the Maltese *kartocc*. As one *kartocc* contains four *terzi* and is computed to be equivalent to one-fourth of an Imperial gallon, one Infirmary *misura* was actually equal to one *terz* or to ten fluid ounces, and two *misure* to one pint.

Duplicate standard wine and oil measures, duly stamped, were kept in the Hospital *dispensa* or *bottiglieria* for purposes of control.

(15) One chicken to every three patients, if made into soup; one quarter of a chicken per patient, if cooked in some other way.

The principal means used to prevent waste was by appealing to the Infirmary professional staff not to order any food of a kind or in quantities that, taking into account the condition of the patient, they could not conscientiously consider necessary. This ban included fish and fresh or preserved fruit, unless prescribed as part of the treatment, as was the case with the *cotognata* and *agresta* (16) the doctors, perhaps used to order to satisfy the whims of a fastidious **Cappellano** or to get a rowdy Knight to swallow some extra unpleasant preparation sent up by the **Aromatario**; but it was absolute on Alicante and other fine wines and on orangeades and lemonades. Evidently the use of sugared drinks had to be severely discountenanced, because sugar was then a very expensive article. (17) Sugar as such, in fact was issued to Knights only, and if they expressly asked for it, as it was found that the **Guardiani** liked it as well. (18)

Besides trying to curb in this way any leanings to thoughtless extravagance on the part of the Infirmary doctors, the Treasury took good care to protect itself as well as the Infirmary **Prodomi**, who were directly responsible for the supplies they indented for, against more diets being shown on paper than there were patients or disagreeing in some particular item with those prescribed.

In this control no less than five Infirmary officers were concerned, who with others that need not be mentioned here formed a very imposing procession when they went round the wards. The five were the **Medico Principale**, his **Medico Secondario** or **Prattico di Medicina**, the **Scrivano delle liste**, one of the Chaplains and one of the **Prodomi**. (19) The **Medico**

(16) The *cotognata* was a preserve made of quinces; the *agresta*, very likely, consisted of pomegranates sweetened with sugar.

(17) R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 1714 p. 132.

(18) R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 645 p. 37.

(19) Two of the eight Infirmary *Cappellani d'Ubbidienza* performed this duty in turn; for which, and for assisting mental patients, they were given an extra remuneration of 5 *scudi* per month. Persons of unsound mind were warded in a

Principale ordered the diet for each patient, and in so doing he was enjoined by regulation to speak out and clearly and to give the **Medico Secondario** time to write the diet on the tablet hung to the patient's bed (20) and the **Cappellano** to take it down in his note-book—the **Controlista**. The **Scrivano delle liste** copied the diets from the patients' tablets, and the **Prodomo** kept his eyes and ears open so as to have no misgivings when signing both the **lista** and the **controlista** at the end of the round. In order to enable the **Scrivano delle liste** and the **Cappellano** to attend both the Physicians' and the Surgeons' rounds, the latter were made half an hour earlier. After much cross checking and countersigning in the Office of the **Prodomi**, an abstract of the diets was prepared and handed to the **Prodomo di Mesata** together with the two **liste**.

But there was more, because during the distribution of the food, another officer, — the **Scrivano della mangia** — went round the wards to see that what was given to each patient agreed with the entries in the two lists: a good practice because it served also the purpose of protecting the patients against possible short issues. There must have been some very strong reasons for all this complicated procedure, which would otherwise strike one as an example of bureaucratic inefficiency. But no one will deny the Order's earnest endeavour to give its Infirmary patients good honest food; and the Infirmary regulations are ample proof of this.

* * *

small room, cut off from the main hospital building; and during meals they were attended by a **Cappellano** to make sure that they ate their food.

This **Prodomo** was one of the two who were not doing duty at the time either as **Prodomo della lingerie** or **Prodomo dell'Economia** known also as the **Prodomo di mesata**. The first had charge for three months of all Hospital equipment, the second of the Hospital provisions for one month in turn with the other **Prodomi**.

(20) Howard states that it was a note fixed to the door of the closets at the side of the patients' beds.

The examination of supplies started as these were delivered at the Infirmary, when the **Prodomo dell'Economia** had to satisfy himself as to their quality, weight and general fitness for food. No leniency was to be shown to the contractors, and the **Prodomi** were specially warned not to buy or consent to receive from them "any meat or poultry, or any giblets, kidneys, calves' heads or anything else." The Treasury insisted that the provisions for the supply of which it was responsible, such as the bread and the wine, should be examined as well and that, if found not to be of the required "perfection", it should be informed at once so as to remedy. Wine was easily an article encouraging fraud, and so the **Prodomi** had to see personally that its quality and strength were according to contract and remained so during storage in the Infirmary cellar.

To carry out the letter and spirit of the regulations the **Prodomo dell'Economia** was a frequent visitor at the kitchen, to see that the meat, chickens and eggs were not stale and that the cook, whose honesty had lately (21) been fortified by the addition of 2 **scudi** and 6 **tari** to his salary of 40 **scudi** a month, was not over zealous in the removal of skin and fat from the meat before it was portioned out, he being entitled to keep half these trimmings for himself. It was also for the **Prodomo** to see that the meat was properly cooked and the broth carefully prepared, and that nothing was abstracted from it while it was cooking notwithstanding that the cauldrons were furnished with a lock of which he kept the key. (22)

The **Prodomo** followed the food, so to say, from the kitchen into the wards, where he supervised its distribution and with the help of one of the Infirmary Chaplains gave the patients their ration of raisins or prunes, an ordinary item of diet, and of "biscottini". Besides the **Prodomo** the

(21) In 1796.

(22) "..... it is not enough for the *Prodomo* to have the keys, as the people in the kitchen are cunning enough to find a way of defeating every precaution". (R.M.L. Arch. 309 p. 165).

regulations required also the Infirmarian or **Commendatore dell'Infermeria**, (23) as he was called after the 1775 General Chapter, to be about in the wards during meals, viz.—8 or 9 o'clock in the morning and 3.30 or 4 in the afternoon, according to the summer or winter time-table. Here he had to examine "with the greatest and most scrupulous care" the bread, wine, meat, chickens and soup (24) served out to patients and, if in doubt ask, the **Prodomo di mesata**, and in case they disagreed call in the Chief Physician to decide, who, if necessary' had to apply such tests as his knowledge of bromatology, then a branch of science very much in its infancy, suggested.

These few notes give support, if that were needed, to the reputation deservedly enjoyed by the Order's Infirmary of being one of the best hospitals in Europe. This reputation rested principally on the high professional standard of its physicians and surgeons and on the sumptuousness of its appointments. One cannot help thinking, however, that with the man in the street the Infirmary food, which the Treasury as well as the Infirmary officials took such pains to protect against the craftiness of contractors, warders, ward servants and kitchen menials, was one of its main recommendations.

(23) The Infirmarian's new title now was the "*Venerando Commendatore, Capo e Governatore della Sacra Infermeria*" R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 309.

(24) In this connection one may mention the strong objection of the *Prodomi* to the wine, bread and oil being distributed two hours before meal-time. Patients used to drink the wine or soak their bread in it, which made it impossible later to verify complaints as to the quantity and quality of the wine dealt out. (R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 638).

THE HOLY INFIRMARY PLATE

Going over the list of plate presented at one time or other by the Venerable Langues of France and Aragon and the **Commun Tesoro** to the Holy Infirmary for the use of its patients, one is struck at first by the absence more or less complete of certain articles rather than by the fact that the plate was made of silver.

Although this plate was for the use of members of the Order and civilian patients only, slaves and "bonavogli" (1) being served in pewter bowls and platters, silver was then a very expensive metal. Thus, while visitors could not help being impressed by this princely sumptuousness, the Order felt it was expected to justify these somewhat ostentatious

(1) "Bonavogli", literally "men of good will, willing to serve", were really loafers of all nationalities pressed to serve in the Navy of the Order. They were given the sum of 255 *scudi* once, their food and clothes. Although their liberty was not restricted as much as the slaves' who rowed in the galleys, their willingness must have had its limitations.

Like the silver, pewter articles were also manufactured locally. Thus, in 1656, at the request of the *Vendi Procuratori del Commun Tesoro*, the Council authorized the issue from the stores of the Order of 160 *rot.* of tin to the *Prodomi* of the Infirmary for the manufacture of dinner plates. Pewter is generally an alloy of tin and lead. R.M.L. Archives. 119 p. 1-15.

A "French Gentleman" who visited Malta sometime in 1678 and, as usual, wrote and published anonymously, *chèz* Gervais Plonzier, Paris, "an exact description of this Island — what he saw and what others before him should have observed"—states that all the Infirmary patients—Knights as well as Slaves—were served *en vaisselle d'argent*. But he states, in the same breath, that the chicken—more than 200—used to prepare broths and *consummés* for the patients were thrown into the rubbish heap—*on jette le reste sans le presenter*: a fanciful statement of waste which the Infirmary *Prodomi* would never have countenanced and which justifies disbelief of the assertion, contrary to the evidence from all other sources, that the Infirmary silver was used for the service of freemen and serfs alike. (R.M.L., Bn. 6.35, p. 125).

tious Infirmary appointments. Probably this is why the inventory or list given in an account of the Infirmary published in 1725 (2) is preceded by a statement that the use of silver, besides adding to the dignity of the Infirmary, contributed to the general cleanliness of the inmates.

No doubt, to an institution providing patients with curtained (3) four-poster beds and woollen mattresses, in wards carpeted, some of them at least, with oriental stuffs and hung with costly tapestries and paintings (4) nothing

(2) *'Dell'argenteria'*. Contribuisce molto al decoro della Sacra Infermeria e polizia degli infermi l'essere questi serviti mattina e sera con posate, scudelle e tondini d'argento; anzi l'istessi caldaroni dalli quali si distribuiscono le minestre, e li bacili grandi dove si tiene la carne e altro, sono d'argento, come appare dalla seguente nota; alle genti di catena si supplisce con stagno.

Scodelle	...	...	...	...	num. 250 di peso lib.	333.4
Piatti	...	...	...	...	356	340.9
Piatti grandi	...	...	...	...	1	4.2
Tazze	...	...	...	...	167	160.8
Bacili grandi	...	...	...	...	3	49.6
Bacilotti	...	...	...	...	12	22
Cocchiari	...	...	...	...	256	54.6
Cocchiaroni	...	...	...	...	10	19.6
Forchette	...	...	...	...	10	2.6
Quartucci	...	...	...	...	43	36.1
Tazze a becco	...	...	...	...	4	4
Vasi a becco	...	...	...	...	1	1
Scatole	...	...	...	...	1	1
Lampade	...	...	...	...	13	59.1
Pignate tra grandi e piccole con coperchio	...	...	...	...	8	135.9
Bocali	...	...	...	...	4	8.1
Sottocoppa	...	...	...	...	1	2.1

"Notizia delle Sacra Infermeria e della Carica delli Commis-
sari delle Povere Inferme. Roma. Stamperia di Rocco Bernabò,
"1725," "R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 1713 p. 9."

(3) "The Adventures of Count George Albert of Erbach"
G. Murray, London, 1891.

"The Diary of Henry Tonge". Charles Knight, 1825.

(4) According to one of the Statutes under the Chapter *de Hospitalitate*, in fact, the Infirmary "should be fitted up with beautiful furniture and dazzle with presents, because Christ lives there, is venerated there and is restored to health there".

was more becoming than silver bowls, plates and cups, which, if simply designed without flourishes and bosses, would also be less trouble to keep clean (5). This, however, did not make up for the absence of table forks of which only ten, probably serving forks, are listed, and of knives; so that, for patients not on spoon diet, the dirtying of hands and garments was a matter of course. Such uncleanness, in any case, was unavoidable at a time when neither table forks nor knives appear to have been provided.

The absence of table forks from the list of Infirmary plate is difficult to explain when we know that forks formed part of the table silver used in the ward rooms of ships of the Order. It is interesting to find in this respect that, in 1667, members of the Order performing their turn of sea duty in the Order's Navy obtained leave from the Venerable Council to provide table silver for their messes, as long as the **Commun Tesoro** was not expected to pay for any. (5a).

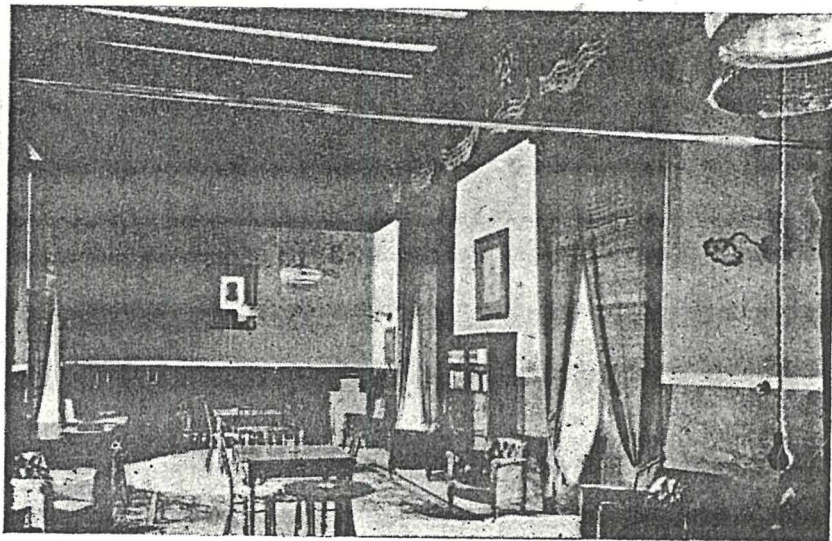
The other Infirmaries of the Order must have had similar table appointments in their time (6). One may presume, however, that the 1725 inventory represents the

(5) "La ^{sa}maisselle qu'on y employe est presque toute en argent, la simplicité de son travail annonce que cette magnificence est moins un objet de luxe qu'un moyen de propreté". St. Priest. "Travels in Malta, 1791."

(5a) The cost of the silver was not to exceed 4000 *scudi* in the case of the flag-ship, the *Capitana*, and 3000 *scudi* in the case of each of the six other galleys or *sensiglie*. The 4000 *scudi* were exceeded by 429 *scudi*, but the smaller ships kept within the prescribed limit. The articles were manufactured locally by three Maltese silver-smiths. The service of the *Capitana* included 30 pairs and that of the other galleys 20 pairs of spoons and forks. (R.M.L., Arch. of the Order 645). In 1722, however, the *Capitana* was allowed to increase its silver outfit by the addition of 9 Italian salvers weighing a little over 40 *libbre* and costing sc. 740.4.12. R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 267 p. 136.

(6) According to Somma-Picenardi (*Itinéraire d'un chrétien de St. Jean de Jerusalem dans l'île de Rhodes*), "R.M.L., Bq. 248 p. 61" the Infirmary in Rhodes had most valuable silver, which was pillaged when the Knights left.

The Infirmary's Office or State Room made into an Officers' Mess when the Infirmary became the Police Depot. The wide panel all round its four walls, just below the ceiling, was decorated with the heraldic bearings of the various Infirmarians, of which the names and dates of office were inscribed on the scrolls under the respective coats of arms. This part of the Infirmary was hit in May, 1941, and only one of its inner walls remains and much less of the frieze; but fortunately the Malta Museum possesses a photographic record of all the coats of arms.



full range of these appointments during the most splendid period of the Order. But, so far, I have been unable to ascertain what the first table silver endowment consisted of and when it was made.

It would appear that one of the first to give substantially of his own, so that the patients in hospital might enjoy the same comforts as in their Auberges or in their far away homes, was an Aragonese Knight, the Venerable Fr. Don Giovanni de Villaragut, or Villar-ragut, who was the Castellano d'Emposta when the Convent was in Rhodes. Before leaving Rhodes for Spain, where he had been appointed to act as the personal representative of the Grand Master, with full powers to collect and forward to the Convent a whole year's revenue from all the estates belonging to his Langue — an extraordinary measure the Order had been compelled to adopt to meet its huge war expenditure — Fr. Don Giovanni made an endowment to the Infirmary.

Evidently a most worthy and clever member of the Religion, de Villaragut had been chosen in his time to fill many important offices and had been given dignities and honours of which he felt he should now show a correspondingly worthy, practical and lasting appreciation. He, therefore, settled upon the Grand Conservator of the Order, then known as the **Drappiere**, the yearly sum of four thousand **soldi** in Catalan currency, to be placed at the disposal of the Infirmary **Prodomi** "so that they may find it "easier to provide and maintain everything that was "necessary for the pilgrims and the sick poor during their "stay in hospital." This sum represented the interest on one hundred thousand **soldi** he had lent to the township and jurats of Tortosa. As it happened, the Catalan trader in which he took passage for Spain in October, 1444, foundered in the vicinity of Malta and de Villaragut lost his life (7).

(7) "Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione et Illma. Militia di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano." Bosio. Parte I, Libr. VI, p. 164.

At page 341, Vol. 6, of his "Collection of Historical Notes", D. Francesco Agius de Soldanis refers to the de Villaragut foundation as follows:—

The sum of 2,000 *libre* is also known to have been lent, in 1376, to the squires of Galba, the yearly interest of 5% to be placed at the disposal of the Infirmary, to increment the de Villaragut foundation. So far the name of this benefactor has not been traced; in all probability he was one of the de Villaragut's descendants. Unfortunately, the Order had a lot of trouble over this bequest when, years after, Don Michel de Galba, the heir to the property, insisted on redeeming his lands from the mortgage. Eventually the matter was settled out of court, in 1707, but not to the advantage of the Order (8).

In a statement made to the Council, in 1646, by a Commission of the Treasury, on the foundations of the Langue of Aragon, Catalogna and Navarra, the four thousand soldi "*assegnati sopra la città di Tortosa*" by De Villaragut, in 1444, were found to have appreciated to 13,559 *libre* Catalane, yielding 615 Maltese *scudi* a year, which the Commission emphasized had up to then been always punctually paid into the coffers of the Order. (9). The Commission had been set up to establish the annual income of each of the Aragonese foundations, for the Council to rule that the income from each be spent for the object specified by the founder and not promiscuously, mostly to build galleys, as had been done until then. In its report, however, no mention of the Galba mortgage was made by the Commission, probably because, as already stated, it was many years after that some sort of agreement could be patched up between the Galba heirs and the Receiver of the Order in Catalogna.

"L'Illmo Sigr. Fr. Giovanni de Villaraguto, Castellano d'Emposta, ha lasciato ottimo esempio dell'ardente sua carità nella pia e gloriosa fondazione di 400 fiorini di rendita e di tutto l'aumento che indi seguisse, fatta da figlio grato alla sua Religione, in servizio delli Signori Infermi, l'anno 1444, come appare per lo Statuto 24 della Hospitalità, e della sua prudenza nello esercizio delle Cariche di Siniscalco, di Luog.te del G.M. Fr. Giovanni di Lastic nel Convento di Rodi e di Ambasciatore, Visitatore e Riformatore in Spagna." R.M.L. ms. 142/6.

(8) R.M.L. Arch. of the Order. 2189 p. 10.

(9) R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 2189 p. 288.

It will be noted that Fr. Don Giovanni's intentions, as expressed in the deed of settlement, gave the **Prodomi** a very wide choice, so that we must not expect all the money to have been devoted entirely to the purchase of silver. Amongst the papers dealing with the foundations of his Langue, in fact, there is a note, undated but probably written between 1628 and 1640, in which the "**Illmo. Sigre. Hospitaliero**" — not named — submitted a list of articles he most urgently needed at the time. (10). It is a short list, but with the deft strokes of a painter's brush it gives us a colourful glimpse of the Infirmary's otherwise rather dusky wards. The items were:—

"Firstly, sixteen canopies of various colours,
"viz., green, blue, red and yellow.

"Also, sixteen wall tents of various colours,
"viz., green, blue, red and yellow.

"Also, one hundred woollen blankets of various
"colours, viz., green, blue, red and yellow.

"Also, fifty silver table sets, each consisting of
"four pieces, viz., plate, soup bowl, cup and spoon.

"Also, two jugs with spout."

As there was no other Aragonese foundation in favour of the Infirmary, except one by de Very for the specific purpose of buying white linen to make bed sheets, the de Villaragut's receipts were used most likely to provide all the other articles in the list as well as the silver (11). However that may be, it is right that the name of de Villaragut should remain connected with the table-ware out of which many short tempered and raw-boned Knights and corpulent but less fiery **Cappellani**, not to mention the non-descript crowd of civilian patients, were served in the "**Sala dei Feriti**", in sight of Mattia Preti's masterpiece of Saints Cosma and Damian, or

(10) R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 2189 p. 130.

(11) According to Caravita, in fact, (*Le Costituzioni della Religione di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano*. p. 138) these receipts were ear-marked by the Grand Conservator to buy canopies and tents, besides silver.

in the other more or less specialised Infirmary wards. That these were also the feelings of the Order is shown by the fact that the counter mark chosen, in 1648, to identify the Infirmary silver was the crest of the Commandery of de Villaragut.

As to the Langue of France, we know that specific donations to buy table silver for the Infirmary were made by some of its members, and by members of the Italian Langue also; but their names, so far, I have been unable to trace. This was not entirely unexpected of the Langue of France (12). The French Bailiffs resident in the Convent being entitled by statute to fill the office of Grand Hospitaller, the highest in the Infirmary, must have felt it due to their exalted position to contribute, individually or from the funds of their Langue, towards the supplementing or replacing of equipment which would add to the repute of the major institution of their Order.

*

*

*

As was to be expected, the need of making good deficiencies and of replacing articles that had become unserviceable recurred with unpleasant regularity.

Thus, in 1647, after the customary periodical inspection of the silver and other Infirmary equipment, Fr. Don Michel de Torrellos, Lieutenant of the Grand Conservator the Bailiff of the Langue of Aragon, found it necessary to ask the Grand Master and Council to authorize the payment of 400 *scudi* to the Master of the Mint out of the "**Cassa delle Fondazioni**" of his Langue: 333 *scudi* to buy new and replace missing or unusable plate, the rest being due by de Torrellos' predecessor for articles replaced during his office (13).

Notwithstanding the watchful care of the **Prodomi di mesata**, who had to be present at the monthly inspection of the Infirmary silver, of the **Armoriere** and the **Scrivano dell'Abito**, who had joint charge of it and of the **Guardiani** who were held directly responsible for it while in use in the

(12) Ibid p. 139.

(13) R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 116 p. 49.

wards, (14) this silver, or rather the occasional if not methodical disappearance of some of it, had always been a source of trouble. As an instance one may mention the order issued by the Council, early in 1685, that every article be stamped with one and the same stamp by the Venerable Grand Conservator, the Bailiff of the Langue of Aragon, and an official record kept of the number (15) and value of each, so as to make indentification easy and so prevent their being stolen and replaced by cheap imitations. The reason for this, as euphemistically disclosed in the order, was the increasing number of incidents affecting the funds of the Infirmary, due to the silver not being uniformly stamped. It is not unlikely, therefore, that as a result of this pilfering, odd pieces of Infirmary silver may even then have come into the hands of discreet collectors or found their way into more discreet crucibles.

*

*

*

Another call on the funds of the Venerable Langues of France and Aragon was made in 1692, when the Council appointed two Commissioners to inquire, together with the Grand Hospitaller and the Lieutenant of the Grand Conservator, into the state of the Infirmary silver. Within ten days the Commissioners reported to the Council that 43 beds in the

(14) Under the Infirmary regulations the Ward Servants (*Guardiani*) could be required to protect the "*Armoriere*" and the "*Scrivano dell'Abito*" against any loss of silver "*nelle forme più valide e per la somma più conveniente.*" R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 409 p. 22.

(15) "Die XX Feb. 1684 *ab Incarn. L'Em.mo e Rev.mo. Sig. G. Maestro e Ven. Consiglio per ovviare agli inconvenienti e interessi che giornalmente crescono nella Sac. Infermeria per ritrovarsi l'argenteria destinata per servitio degli infermi con diverse bolle, unam. voto han deliberato che in tutta suddetta argenteria si metta il bollo della fondatione che nella vendita Lingua di Aragona, Catalogna e Navarra a questo effetto è destinata. E che tanto il Venerando Conservatore come tutti i suoi successori tengano in poter loro nota del numero dell'argenteria e prezzo di ciascun pezzo affinchè nel riconoscerla non possa aversi nè inganno nè fraude.*" R.M.L. Lib. Conc. Stat. Arch. 262.

Old Ward and 138 beds in the Large Ward and in the Corsia had no silver plate, and that 367½ lbs. of silver would be required for its manufacture. Of this the Grand Hospitaller was able to provide 29 lbs. out of discarded Infirmary plate belonging to his Langue, sufficient for the requirements of the Old Ward. The remaining 338½ lbs. the Conservator's Lieutenant — the Venerable Bailiff Maix, representing the Langue of Aragon — was at a loss how to find, as the unserviceable plate he could dispose of at the time weighed only 7.4 lbs. He, therefore, proposed that the Council should authorize the Treasury to release from the "Torre" (16) a number of silver articles sufficient to make up the other 331.4 lbs., the Treasury to be reimbursed out of the revenues of the foundations of his Langue as they came in. The report was approved. A detailed account of the plate (16a) was also prepared by the Commission, showing that it consisted of 905 pieces weighing 1099.1.12 marcs. The marc at that time was employed also as a measure of weight for gold and silver; and when applied to silver its equivalent was 8 ounces (17).

While, as a result of this and perhaps of later smaller additions, the Infirmary silver may have easily reached the size indicated in the 1725 account — 1140 pieces weighing 1231 lbs. or 2464 marcs — it is not likely that it was much added to after; indeed it must have exhausted all the resources of the Bailiffs of France and of Aragon to keep on replacing deficiencies and cast-offs.

(16) This was a tower in the Valletta Palace used as a safe depository for gold, silver and other valuables accruing to the Order from the *spogli* of Brothers dying in Convent. In June 1692, the Grand Master and Council decided that the silver articles be used "per rifare i vasi dell'Infermeria et altre occorrenze della Religione":—to replace the silver of the Infirmary and other requirements of the Order. R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 263 p. 113.

(16a) See please list of plate at end.

(17) "Marcha est quoddam pondus, scil. media libra, ut dicitur argenti." Du Conge. Vol. II p. 437.

All the Infirmary silver, when valued in 1788, was worth 34,498 *scudi*, (18) and as the silver articles used in the Chapel weighed just about 40 lbs., the value of the table silver may be assessed with reasonable approximation at between 33,000 and 33,500 *scudi*, a sufficiently impressive figure though it was only a little more than half the then yearly cost of maintenance of the Infirmary.

Bad times, however, loomed ahead, and in November 1795 (19) it was found necessary to sell all superfluous Infirmary silver. This was part of an extensive scheme of retrenchment to meet excess of expenditure over revenue: the direct disastrous result of the French Revolution on the finances of the Order and, incidentally, of the Order's huge commitments over its incorporation of the Antonine Order in 1777.

How much of the Order's silver was left in 1798 (20) for Napoleon to plunder and turn into cash by sale to local traders, so that he might carry the proceeds with him to Egypt, or leave behind to be melted and coined to pay his Malta garrison, is not known (21). Very likely most of it formed part of the 800,000 francs in silver locked in the strong room of the "Courageuse" which left the Grand

(18) According to a published statement by Bosredon de Ransijat, Secretary of the Commun Tesoro, quoted by Boisjelin in his "History of Malta," and by W.H. Thornton in "Memoir on the Finances of Malta. 1836" all the State silver of the Order was worth 206,422 *scudi* in 1788, and during the ten years ending April, 1788, the Order spent on an average 3277 *scudi* a year for its maintenance.

(19) ". . . Il superfluo degli argenti dell'Hospitale si riduca in moneta." R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 276. (16.11.1795).

(20) During the financial year ending 30th April, 1796, the Treasury derived 36575 *scudi* from the sale of State silver. W. H. Thornton, "Memoir on the Finances of Malta". 1836.

(21) In accordance with one of Napoleon's Orders, dated 13.6.1798, from 250,000 to 300,000 francs of State silver was to be sold to local traders and the money sent to the Paymaster; the rest was to be left at the Mint to be coined and the money remitted to the Paymaster of the Division. De la Jonquiere. "L'Expedition d'Egypte." Vol. I. p. 622.

Harbour some days after Napoleon's departure, having been delayed by the time taken to complete the inventory of the Order's treasures (22).

Notwithstanding its eventful history, it would not be surprising if a few pieces of the Infirmary silver weathered the 1798 storm and were now to be found forming part of some treasured collection here or abroad. Napoleon's instructions of the 13th June, to sell at once as much as 300,000 francs worth of the Order's plate locally, should have given many of the Infirmary's specimens a good chance of survival. After all, apart from the silver in the Order's Embassies in Paris and Rome, there was more than 184,000 **scudi's** worth of plate (23) in Malta for Napoleon to melt or carry away as such.

Of a number of exhibits of old silver articles in the Valletta Museum, thirty-three are known to have belonged to the Holy Infirmary, some to the Santo Spirito Hospital and a few — six spoons marked "Spedaletto" — to the Home for Female Incurables, founded by Caterina Scappi, in 1643, and known later as the "**Ospedaletto delle Donne.**" The Infirmary specimens are 3 soup bowls, 3 cups with round handles and 2 with straight handles, 3 feeders, 6 spoons large, 9 spoons small, and 7 drinking cups. This silver, which formed part of a larger quantity stored at the Monte di Pietà, has been on exhibition at the Museum since 1904.

(22) Ibid. Vol. II. p. 6.

(23) W. H. Thornton "Memoir on the Finances of Malta" 1836 p. 20.

List of Holy Infirmary plate in 1692.

The details of the silver existing in the Infirmary in 1692, as given by the Commission, were as follows:—

Gli argenti del C. Tesoro sono	Marchi	160.	1.	6
„ Veneranda L. di Francia	„	426.	7.	18
„ Veneranda L. di Aragona	„	512.	0.	12

Scodelle 192

L. di Francia	72	...	...	...	„	109.	0.	6
L. di Aragona	120	...	...	...	„	205.	5.	0
C. Tesoro	2	...	...	...	„	3.	1.	0

192 317. 6. 6

Piatti 200

L. di Francia	72	...	...	...	„	105.	6
L. di Aragona	92	...	...	...	„	83.	4
C. Tesoro	36	...	...	...	„	32.	1. 12

200 221. 3 12

Tazze 195

L. Francia	68.	...	...	...	„	79.	3
L. di Aragona	100	...	...	...	„	135.	4
C. Tesoro	17	...	...	...	„	15.	6. 12

195 130. 5. 12

Bacili 3

L. di Francia	1	...	...	...	„	19.	6. 12
L. di Aragona	2	...	...	...	„	39.	7. 12
	3					59.	6

Cocciare 173

L. di Francia	75	...	...	...	„	17.	0. 12
L. di Aragona	89	...	...	...	„	15.	1

173 32. 1. 12

Quartucci 92

L. di Francia	58	...	...	...	„	63.	6. 12
L. di Aragona	10	...	...	...	„	7.	5
C. Tesoro	24	...	...	...	„	26.	1

92 77. 4. 12

Bacilotti 20

L. Francia	„	28.	7. 12
------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	---	-----	-------

1 *Bacile per aceto e agresta*

L. Francia	„	1.	5. 12
------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	---	----	-------

1 *Scatola per Zucchero*

L. di Francia	„	1.	2. 0
---------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	---	----	------

<i>Bacili d'acqua a mano</i> 4				
L. di Aragona	2	...	...	8. 7. 0
C. Tesoro	2	...	...	8. 3. 0
	<u>4</u>			<u>17. 2</u>
2 <i>Cocciaroni</i>				
L. di Aragona	...	...	...	3. 2. 0
1 <i>Vaso ossia tazza a becco</i>				
C. Tesoro	...	...	...	1. 2. 12
1 <i>Sottocoppa</i>				
C. Tesoro	...	...	...	2. 6. 12
4 <i>Bacili di acqua a mano</i>				
C. Tesoro	...	...	...	12. 0. 0
<i>Lampade d'argento</i> 12				
L. di Aragona	2	...	...	10. 3
C. Tesoro	10	...	...	57. 4. 12
	<u>12</u>			<u>67. 7. 12</u>
<i>Argento in vari pezzetti</i>				
				<u>1. 0. 18</u>
				1099. 1. 12

R.M.L. Arch. of the Order 263 p. 113.