“LA SOCIETÀ DELLE SCUOLE NORMALI DELLA VALLETTA”
A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKDROP

Joe Debono

If for some sectors of life in Malta, the Napoleonic interlude was, in many ways, tragic, its effect on Maltese education was absolutely catastrophic. The University which Grandmaster Pinto had opened on 22nd November, 1769, in the beautiful building that had previously housed the Jesuit-run ‘Collegium Melitense’, was closed by Napoleon’s order of 18th June, 1798, to be replaced by ‘une École Centrale’ modelled on those of Paris. Likewise, the Dominican University of ‘Sancta Maria Portus Salutis’, founded in 1729 – which, when still a ‘Studium Particulare’, had among its lecturers the celebrated Fr. Matteo Rispoli, a scholar acclaimed even in Paris – had to close its doors, never to re-open them again in its pristine glory.

The same premature death also killed the ‘Endowed’ schools run jointly by the four ‘Universitates’ – or local communes – viz: those of Notabile, Rabat, Gozo, Vittoriosa, and Valletta, as well as by the Notabile Cathedral and the Rabat, Gozo, Matrice.

Besides, the several private schools – run mostly by ecclesiastics – had, likewise, to shut their doors, because the many changes brought about by the French

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2 Idem. passim.
government and the ensuing tumultuous times were not conducive to any form of schooling, even though Napoleon had drawn up an ambitious plan of opening 15 primary schools\textsuperscript{11} to be, at least partly, maintained on the revenues of the suppressed convents of the religious orders.\textsuperscript{12}

All this means that during the short but turbulent, two-year, French occupation of Malta, local education went into complete hibernation from which several institutions never woke up again, or found the aftermath uncongenial to their pristine status, and underwent a considerable metamorphosis. Nor was this pathetic situation remedied when the famished forces of General Vaubois were forced to surrender on 5th September, 1800\textsuperscript{13}, and the British became ‘de facto' masters of our islands.

Certainly, within a few weeks of the French departure, Captain Alexander, John Ball – appointed by the local Consiglio Popolare as chief of the Maltese, and confirmed in that role by the Bourbonic King of the Two Sicilies as his representative in Malta – began to take steps for the reopening of Pinto’s University. In fact, on 28th October, 1800, he appointed Canon Saverio Caruna – one of the leaders of the Maltese rebels – Rector\textsuperscript{14}, and on 6th November the academic year was inaugurated\textsuperscript{15}, although the first lectures were started a week later, on 13th November\textsuperscript{16}. However, as no head can survive without a body, so the University could not really thrive and grow if it did not have a system of primary and secondary schools to feed it with new students.

Nevertheless, it took the local administration 38 long years to start opening free, government, elementary schools for the masses. But such was the general yearning for education that no less than 39 private, mostly fee-paying schools of all shapes, sizes and academic levels were opened between 1800 and 1840\textsuperscript{17}. These included day – and boarding – schools as well as academies and colleges. Their syllabi were equally varied, for besides the common 3R’s, some taught such subjects as: Universal and Church History, Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Chaldean, Syriac and German\textsuperscript{18}; Embroidery\textsuperscript{19}; various sciences, the Humanities and Belles Lettres\textsuperscript{20}, as well as sewing and knitting.\textsuperscript{21}

With but few exceptions, all these private schools were fee-paying, and students had to for out rates ranging from 30 tari per student\textsuperscript{22} to 1 dollar per month per student\textsuperscript{23}. In the case of one boarding-school, at least, students had to pay 40 pounds sterling per annum\textsuperscript{24}.

Such fees were astronomically exorbitant for the average Maltese family, if assessed against the socio-economic conditions of those days. By 1824, for example, the Committee of Charitable Institutions was handing out the considerable sum of £3,738 per annum in assistance of the poor\textsuperscript{25}, and no less than 4,000 men had applied for charitable relief\textsuperscript{26}, this number almost trebling in the mid-thirties\textsuperscript{27}. Those lucky enough to have a job were hardly better off, for wages were very low, even by Mediterranean standards, “...being only half what was paid in the Ionian Islands”.\textsuperscript{28} In fact, between 1826 and 1842, a male agricultural labourer earned 6/\textsterling to 8d per day for something like 15 hours of solid work, whereas his female counterpart was paid 3d to 4d. A child averaged 1d to 1/2d.\textsuperscript{29} Even as late as the early decades of the present century, salaries and wages were still abysmally low. Certainly, the teachers who were responsible for the elementary education of the present writer had started their ‘noble’ career at the miserable sum of £4 per annum (i.e. 48 scudi per annum or 1 tari 12 grains i.e. less than 1c 1m per day).

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{11} Siciluna, Hannibal, P., op. cit., p. 100: “Il sera etabli dans les iles de Malte et du Gozzo quinze \textit{ecoles primaires}.”
\bibitem{12} Id. ibid: “Il sera affecte au payement de chaque instituteur une portion suffisante des biens des couvents suprimes”.
\bibitem{14} Vella, Andrew P., “The University of Malta”, op. cit., p. 63. Cfr. Iadem, p. 62: “... eundem Artium omnium Scientiarumque Inspectorem generalmn ac Praesidem creaverat......”
\bibitem{16} Id., ibid.
\bibitem{19} M.G.G., No. 771, Dec. 28th, 1825, p. 392.
\bibitem{20} M.G.G., No. 1236, Sep. 24th, 1834, p. 321.
\bibitem{22} M.G.G. No. 771, Dec. 28th, 1825, op. cit., loc. cit.
\end{thebibliography}
But quite apart from the abject poverty of the masses, another problem militated against the spread of popular education, namely the British presence in Malta, which was quite a unique experience fraught with moral dangers. For, since the departure of the Arabs in 1127 A.D., all the ruling powers had been Catholic and, therefore, posed no religious threat to local beliefs and practices. But the British were Protestant, and some were even aggressively so. The books they were likely to introduce on the island were, therefore, potentially tainted.

However, at first all went well, for the British residents in Malta up to 1830 never exceeded 700, excluding the garrison. So, they could use "the chapel in the Governor's Palace at Valletta as their place of worship." When their number increased, rumours began to spread that St. John's co-cathedral might be converted into a Protestant church.

Furthermore, quite an overt attempt at proselytizing the Maltese was made as early as 1809, when the directors of the London Missionary Society despatched a young German missionary, by the name of Weisenger, to start his conversion work on the island. Besides, a small Bible Society was locally formed on the initiative of the English banker, Henry Drummond. Other Bible Societies soon appeared, and a number of unauthorized versions of the Bible in Maltese translation but without the requisite nihil obstat, began to be distributed.

To make this proselytizing attempt even more obvious, a few gratuitous schools were opened for the poor children. These were often run by Protestant Ministers like the Rev. J. Keeling, a Methodist Missionary, and Mr. Brownwell, a Wesleyan missionary. The latter aroused so much local opposition by his unorthodox teaching of the Bible that he had to resign because he felt "constrained by a sense of Christian duty, to withdraw from all further connection with the Institution, in consequence of its being deemed advisable to withhold (sic!) the Holy Scriptures and religious instruction from the children."38

Quite naturally, therefore, the local Church authorities were greatly alarmed, very much more so since a few well-known Maltese renounced their faith and became Protestant. Among these, one may, perhaps, mention Dr. Cleardo Naudi, Professor of Chemistry at the local University; Reverend M.A. Camilleri, an apostate priest who had become an Anglican,39 and Mikhail Anton Vassalli, Professor of Maltese and writer of scholarly books like "Lexicon" and "Mylsen Phoenician-Punicum sive Grammatica Melitensis," and now rightly considered as "the father of Maltese". Although Vassalli may not have officially renounced his Catholic faith, he certainly helped -- like Naudi and Camilleri -- in the translation of the Bible without the requisite permission of the local Church authorities, and was, therefore censured, so that when he died, he was buried in a Protestant cemetery.42

Consequently, the local Church authorities kept aloof from the various attempts not only of school-opening but also of helping the spread of both English and Maltese.

LA SOCIETÀ DELLE SCUOLE NORMALI DELLA VALLETTA IS BORN

It is against this background that one has to evaluate the bold attempt of an Anglo-Maltese Society formed in 1819 with the sole aim of popularizing education, and to assess its limited success.

An 'ad hoc' committee was soon elected to manage the society. It was made up of an equal number of Maltese and British gentlemen, and included a Roman Catholic priest in order to allay any moral suspicions in local Church authorities and parents alike, viz:

30 Wettiger, Godfrey, "The History of Gozo from the early middle ages to modern time", in "Gozo: The Roots of an Island" - henceforth referred to as "Roots" - Malta 1990, p. 49.
33 Id., ibid.
34 Sheridan Wilson, Samuel, "A Narrative of the Greek Mission; or Sixteen Years in Malta and Greece", London, 1839, p. 62.
35 Idem, p. 69.
36 Idem, p. 100.
37 M.G.G., No. 1208, March 12, 1834, p. 90.
38 Id., ibid.
40 Idem, pp. 29-30.
42 Id., ibid.
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As was to be expected, the first endeavour of the committees was to rope in a number of supporting members who would be willing to contribute money towards the actualization of the dream. Fortunately, they were quite successful, for no less than 202 names appeared on the list of the first Report of the Society.48 But there were other contributors; only their names did not appear because they had donated less than 10 scudi.49

Many registered supporters undertook to make an annual subscription of not less than 5 scudi, but there were several who promised to pay 10, 15 and even 20 scudi per annum.50 Besides, there were others who made once-only contributions of 5 to 20 scudi; one even paid 25, one paid 39.3, another 40 and yet another 100 scudi, apart from their annual subscriptions.51

These once-only contributions added up to the considerable sum of 1230. 10 scudi, while the annual subscriptions amounted to no less than 1661 scudi.49

The committee also drew up a set of rules which would regulate the procedures of the Society and its committee as well as its Valletta schools. These are stated below ‘in toto’ in order to show how very meticulous all those involved were in order to ensure the success of their venture:

I. The society is to be known as “Società delle Scuole Normali della Valletta”.50
II. Any annual subscription of 5 scudi or a once-only donation of 50 scudi will entitle the donor to keep one pupil continuously in school, except in cases as detailed below.51
III. Any annual subscription of 10 scudi or a once-only donation of 100 scudi will entitle the contributor to keep two pupils continuously in the school except as detailed below; and so on pro rata for bigger donations. Furthermore, such contributors will be considered as Directors of the Society, and as such will be eligible to become Committee Members, and will have the right to attend and vote in General Meetings.52

46 Idem, p. 23 Fnote: “Varie Donazioni di somme minori di Dieci Scudi sono state ricevute che non si trovano registrate nella … lista”.
48 Id., ibid.
49 Id., ibid.
50 Idem, p. 13.
51 Id., ibid.
52 Id., ibid.
IV. No pupil under the age of 6 years will be admitted.53

V. When only 20 vacancies remain to make up the total school population decided upon by the Committee, no pupils under the age of 8 will be admitted, and the older ones will be given preference.54

VI. Absent contributors can recommend a student by proxy.55

VII. A General Meeting of the Directors will be held annually in October, during which a report will be read – and, if approved, eventually published – giving details of the work done during the previous year. Besides, other regulations and decisions deemed necessary will be adopted. Furthermore, a President, all the Vice-Presidents, a Treasurer, a Secretary and other Members of the Committee will be newly-elected or re-elected, but that fourth part of the Committee (except the President and the Vice-Presidents) who least attended to their functions during the previous year will not be eligible for election for the following year56.

VIII. A special meeting of the Directors will be convened on a request by, at least, 7 Members of the Committee or on a request by 12 Directors, after a 7-day notice in which the scope of such a Meeting is indicated57.

IX. The Society will be under the direction of a Committee made up of 25 Directors as follows: 1 President, 4 Vice-Presidents, a Treasurer, a Secretary and 18 other Directors58.

X. The Committee will meet on the first Thursday of every month, and 5 Members will form a quorum59.

XI. The Committee can fill up any vacancy in its ranks – except that of President or Vice-President – occurring between General Meetings: the Directors calling a Meeting and electing the new Member during the next monthly Meeting60.

XII. The Committee can elect as Honorary Members any persons – not living in Valletta or its neighbourhood – deemed to have performed some essential service to the Society61.

XIII. Any three Members of the Committee may request a special meeting of the Committee, specifying the object of such a meeting in a written note which will be circularized together with the invitation to such a meeting62.

XIV. No Member of the Committee may be employed to do any work of the Society against a remuneration63.

XV. The Committee must employ the Teacher of the School, and all the other ‘ufficiali inferiori’ of the Society. They must also draw up provisional regulations whereby the school will be managed up to the next General Meeting only, unless these are confirmed in such a meeting64.

XVI. No book or paper to be used for instruction can be introduced in the school unless these are previously presented to and approved by the Committee65.

XVII. If there is room in the school for more students than can be rightfully recommended by Contributors, the Committee can fill up such vacancies and even nominate students to fill such vacancies if there are not enough recommendations without, however, prejudicing the rights of contributors, in accordance with the following regulations66.

XVIII. The Treasurer must accept all the sums of money received for use by the Society and make all payments sanctioned by the Committee. He must also, during the monthly meetings, present a note, drawn up by the Collector, listing all contributors who have not paid their contributions for three months. The Treasurer must also present before the Annual General Meeting a detailed account duly audited and closed by the Committee. Finally, the Treasurer must also deposit any funds with the Anglo-Maltese Bank. He must not hold any money except what is necessary to meet any recurrent monthly expenses67.

XIX. Any pupil’s recommendation must be signed by his contributor who will specify the names of the pupil’s parents, their address, the number of children in the pupil’s family, the family profession and circumstances, as well as the name and age of the recommended pupil. This recommendation will be kept by the teacher for presentation before and approval by the Committee during the next monthly meeting. Once approved, it will be entered in the school register by the teacher68.

XX. If a recommendation is not approved, or if the place of a recommended and admitted pupil becomes vacant, the teacher must immediately notify in writing the relevant contributor who may then recommend another pupil. But if he fails to do so for two weeks from the receipt of the notification, the Committee will, at the next monthly meeting, fill the

53 Id., ibid.
54 Id., ibid.
55 Id., ibid.
56 Idem, pp. 13-14.
58 Id., ibid.
59 Id., ibid.
60 Id., ibid.
61 Id., ibid.
62 Id., ibid.
63 Id., ibid.
64 Id., ibid.
65 Id., ibid.
67 Idem, p. 15.
68 Id., ibid.
 vacancy; and the contributor will lose his right of recommendation “per quella volta”\textsuperscript{69}.

XXI. All recommendations must be renewed annually by the Committee in August in the light of pupils’ good conduct reports drawn up by the teacher. Likewise all recommendations must be renewed every year by the contributors in January\textsuperscript{70}.

XXII. If a contributor dies, or refrains from making his annual subscription, or fails to renew his recommendation every year in January, then his recommended pupil will lose his place unless he is allowed to continue in school by the Committee. But such a pupil will always be liable to be withdrawn from school if there are no more places for students who, from time to time, are recommended by right by contributors\textsuperscript{71}.

XXIII. No pupil can be admitted who is not free from all contagious diseases; and all students must come to school clean, “ben lavati, e con i capelli tagliati e pettinati”\textsuperscript{72}.

XXIV. The school time-table will be as follows: from 9.00 a.m. to 12 noon throughout the year and from 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. from 1st March to 1st November. Throughout all the other months, the afternoon sessions will be from 2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m., but the Committee can make any changes they deem opportune\textsuperscript{73}.

XXV. In every monthly meeting of the Committee, two Inspectors for every week of the following month must be nominated. These must go to the school, at least, twice per week to test the progress made by the pupils and to ensure that good order prevails in the school. In an ‘ad hoc’ note-book, they must put down the time of their inspection, and make any comments regarding the teacher’s reports as well as any other aspect of the school. They must also sign their entry and present their report before the next monthly meeting of the committee\textsuperscript{74}.

XXVI. The teacher must make a daily note – or ask someone to do it – of all absentees, and he must also make a weekly note of the reasons given for such absences. He will present such notes to the Inspectors and make a relevant reference of such absences in his monthly report to the Committee. Besides, he must include in his report a note regarding pupils who were promoted from one class to another because of their progress during the proceeding month, and he must make a list too of any prizes handed out\textsuperscript{75}.

\textsuperscript{69} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{71} Idem, pp. 15-16.
\textsuperscript{72} Idem, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{73} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Id., ibid.

XXVII. The teacher must also keep a note of all the recommendations made by the contributors, or the Committee, regarding pupils. He must also record the reasons why any pupil left the school. Such notes are to be submitted to the Committee during the first meeting held in January, February, July and August of every year so that the Committee can check whether all the recommendations have been duly renewed and registered\textsuperscript{76}.

XXVIII. No one is allowed to change, omit or add to any of these rules and regulations without the authorization of a General Meeting\textsuperscript{77}.

Despite the thorough preparations made and the hard work done by the Society throughout 1819, the school could not start operations as yet. In fact, in its first report read out during the General Meeting held on 15th October, 1820, it was explicitly stated that: “Quelli membri della ‘Società delle Scuole Normali della Valletta’, che furono presenti alla sua formazione, si ricorderanno che, una Seduta differita doveva tenersi fra il termine di due mesi. Il Comitato perciò è nel obbligo di esporre primamente che, i loro arrangiamenti non essendo completi, i contribuenti sarebbero stati inutilmente radunati”\textsuperscript{78}.

The Committee, therefore, proceeded “a sottomettere ai suoi costituenti un ragguglio delle operazioni dell’anno passato, e dello stato presente dell’Istituzione”\textsuperscript{79}.

The Committee had some very commendable aims regarding the education that was to be imparted in its schools, and knowing how crucial a factor a teacher always is in education, they immediately acquired the services of a certain Mr. Giuseppe Naudi, who had been studying the ‘Monitorial System’ in London, where he had been sent by the British and Foreign School Society who paid all his expenses\textsuperscript{80}.

On his return, Mr. Naudi had opened a private school in which he quite successfully taught 42 local children. Impressed by his achievement, the Committee, in its meeting of 18th November, 1819, appointed him teacher of the school that they intended opening. His salary was, however, back-dated to 1st August, 1819\textsuperscript{81}.

\textsuperscript{76} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Idem, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{79} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} Idem, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{81} Id., ibid.
The British and Foreign School Society had been born in 1814 on the ashes of the Royal Lancasterian Association\(^1\), which, in turn, had been formed in 1810\(^2\). The method of teaching adopted by the Society of British and Foreign School was called ‘monitorial’ or ‘mutual’ and had been developed by a clergyman of the Established Church of England, Andrew Bell, and Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker\(^3\). Apparently, they had both “hit upon the device by accident and to have made their discovery independent of each other”\(^\text{4}^\).

The most attractive feature of this ‘monitorial system’ was its cheapness at a time when education for the masses was considered a purely charitable undertaking throughout the world. In fact, “The annual cost of teaching a child in a Lancasterian school was 7s 6d\(^5\), and in a very large school this amount could be still further reduced”\(^\text{6}\). Indeed, it was estimated that 500 pupils could be taught in the same school for 4s 2d per head (i.e. 2.5 scudi) per annum\(^6\).

If only for this reason, therefore, the method was exceptionally well suited for Malta and, as was to be expected, the Society was not unaware of its financial advantages. In fact, in their first report, they clearly stated that their major problem was limited to finding “un locale sufficientemente grande per dare pieno effetto a questo vantaggioso sistema, la superiorità della quale consiste nella pratica d'insegnare da 500 a 1,000 ragazzi per quasi l'istessa spesa, che occorrerebbe per imparare (sic!) da 50 a 100”\(^6\).

Besides, one teacher could, it was believed, teach a thousand pupils, because all he had to do was to teach a number of bright pupils, called ‘monitors’, who would then pass on the instruction they had themselves received to others\(^6\). The principal role of the teacher, therefore, was to instruct, oversee and inspire the monitors.

Naturally, the instruction given under such circumstances could not but be elementary in the extreme and very mechanical\(^6\). So rigid indeed was this method that it did not even allow for pupils to make questions, let alone show any creative impulse\(^6\). Despite these obvious disadvantages, however, some learning was achieved. Indeed, the system became very popular not only in England and Wales but also in other parts of the world as well, for we are told this teaching concept became so fashionable that Lancaster's school in Borough Road attracted “Foreign princes, ambassadors, peers, commoners, ladies of distinction, bishops and archbishops, Jews and Turks”\(^6\).

So, The Normal School Society was not only introducing the most fashionable teaching method of the time, but also the guidance of an expert teacher – probably the first British – trained one in the history of Maltese education. The only possible flaw, therefore, was the fact that both Lancaster and Bell were, as we have seen, Protestant. Besides, although The British and Foreign School Society was allegedly non-sectarian, Bell’s National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, was, almost by definition, anti-Catholic. No wonder that the local Church authorities kept aloof from the local educational adventure! Nor must it be forgotten that up to the first decades of the 19th century, the education of the poor was deemed, throughout most of Europe, as a merely charitable undertaking. Indeed, “For the children of the lower orders no education which went beyond the merest rudiments of literacy was considered either necessary or appropriate”\(^\text{6}^\). There were even some people who believed that the education of the masses was anti-social: “Much public opinion, indeed, among both the elite and the industrialists would have demned them even this meagre medium of instruction, believing that any education at all would render them dissatisfied with their lowly lot, and thus cause them to become a menace to the stability of society”\(^\text{6}^\).

Luckily for Maltese education, this feeling was never so pronounced, and poor children flocked to any gratuitous school on the island, without any social repercussions either in writing or in fact! One major flaw in the Society’s thinking was, therefore, the invariable demand for a recommendation backed by the annual payment of, at least, 5 scudi\(^6\) for every student admitted. However, it is to the Society’s credit that when there were more places than recommendations “sarà in libertà del Comitato di compiere il numero”\(^\text{6}^\), though this could only be done, provided that the contributors’ rights were not thereby prejudiced in any way\(^6\).

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84 Idem, p. 53.
85 Id., ibid.
86 This would be equivalent to 4.5 scudi.
88 Id., ibid.
89 “Rapporto”, op. cit., p. 5.
90 Barnard, ut supra, p. 54.
91 Id., ibid.
92 Id., ibid.
95 Id., ibid.
Having thus persuaded Mr. Naudi to join their school, the Society also solved their other problem of finding a big enough house to accommodate their students, by approaching the Governor, Lt. General, The Rt. Honourable, Sir Thomas Maitland (1813-1824), who very kindly offered them the use of a big hall on the ground floor "del cessato Ospedale di Marina". It was estimated that it could provide places for about 350 to 400 students.

Besides, it had an entrance hall that would make-do instead of a yard, in which most pupils could take shelter from sun and rain before entering their class-room, and in which some of those who lived at a distance from the school could have their lunch.

While all these feverish preparations were being made, no less a person than the Treasurer of the British and Foreign School Society, Mr. William Allen, arrived in Malta, after having visited several countries to promote "l'opera caritatevole dell'educazione universale". As was to be expected, the Committee grabbed the opportunity with both hands, asking questions and advice that would help them in their ambitious task.

Having been encouraged by both the Governor and Mr. Allen, the Committee, on 25th February, 1820, appointed a sub-Committee made up of some of its Members to advise on all the requirements of the new school so that it would open its doors as early and as cheaply as possible.

The sub-Committee carried out its mission very satisfactorily and expeditiously, for the new school opened its doors after slightly more than 2 months, on 15th May, 1820.

In order to boost the number of potential 'teaching personnel', the Committee—after ensuring that the 42 pupils previously taught by Mr. Naudi in his school were fully cognizant of the 'mutual method' of teaching and, therefore, potentially helpful as monitors—decided to admit them to their 'Normal' school without the requisite recommendations by contributors. However, these pupils had to seek and get such recommendations after the lapse of one year.

Moreover, seeing that not more than 180 recommendations were to be expected, the Committee 'generously' decided to admit up to 50 pupils, "fanciulli di persone di mediocri circostanze pagando Sei Tari al mese; da essere ritenuti nella Scuola a beneficio del Comitato".

One cannot, perhaps, but applaud such 'altruism'. However, it could not even remotely benefit the poorest classes who were fighting a dire battle for subsistence and could not, therefore afford the 6 tari imposed! Mention has already been made of the wretched socio-economic conditions prevailing at the time, resulting from the depression which hit Malta after the initial boon of the immediate post-Napoleonic period. A few more statistics will, perhaps, give a clearer picture of the abysmal local poverty. In the 1830's, out of a population of 114,236, no less than 10,617 were poor, and several "had been reduced to sleeping out of doors and to living on prickly pears, thistles and clover".

Nor was this way of life relieved by employment for "the family of a field labourer, consisting of five children, including the gains of the parents, earned about £5 a year all told"—and there were 32,428 of these earning their living off the land, excluding 2,215 proprietors. Besides, 15,000 more were engaged in the cotton industry where male weavers received only 3d a day, male spinners 2d and females 1d. Other workers were in the same plight: a salt-pan labourer, for example, earned an average of 3½d per day, whereas a tanner had to be content with just 1d for a full day's work. Yet wheat bread, at the time "... the principal part of the diet of all classes in Malta ... of the working classes, it was almost the exclusive food. It cost 2½d per rotolo (i.e. 1.75lbs.) Now, it is calculated that a male labourer consumed 2lbs. bread per day, while women and children half that amount. This means that even if they ate nothing else but barley bread which cost about 1½d per pound, the cost of feeding a family of two parents and two children

99 Idem, p. 5.
100 Id., ibid.
101 Id., ibid.
102 Idem, p. 6.
103 Id., ibid.
104 Id., ibid.
105 Id., ibid.
106 Id., ibid.
107 Id., ibid.
109 Idem, p. 159.
112 Miege, Dominique, ut supra, p. 159.
113 Mangion, Giovanni, "Governo Inglese, Risorgimento Italiano Ed Opinione Pubblica a Malta (1848-1851)”, Malta, 1970, p. 17.
115 Id., ibid.
for one year would be in the region of £11.8 – more than double the family’s yearly earnings!

In such dismal circumstances, how could a parent afford to pay 6 tari per month – more than three days’ pay! Indeed, one finds it difficult not to conclude that the Committee members shared the then current universal view that education was not meant for the really poor.

In fact, seemingly oblivious of the prevailing destitution and penury, the Committee unconcernedly expressed their joy at the fact that the Reading Lessons in their Valletta schools were the same as those used in Florence, Italy, and were based on the ‘mutual’ teaching method. Their only note of regret regarded the sudden death of Mr. Giuseppe Slythe, one of the founders of the Society, and an indefatigable Committee member. In fact, on the eve of the onset of the illness which ended his life, he had attended a sitting. No one, at the time, had the slightest inkling that five days later, one would be taking part in his funeral cortege.

Meanwhile, the schools were in full operation and, in accordance with Regulation XXV of the Society, the appointed Inspectors had made their weekly visits to the school and sent in their reports – regularly favourable. Good comments were also made by the several visitors to the school. Certainly, the pupils’ attendance was regular, for the Committee proudly announced that despite the discipline in the school, the children gladly attended. Even those who had initially absented themselves, were now very regular and punctual in their attendance. The parents, too, showed their interest by sending written apologies whenever sickness or some other circumstance prevented their children from attending.

The following Tables give a very detailed picture of the school population by class, as well as the numbers promoted from one class to another because of the progress achieved in the short time under review:

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<th>Table 1</th>
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<td>Pupils admitted to Class I</td>
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<td>Promoted to Class II</td>
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<td>Promoted to Class IV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoted to Class V</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoted to Class VI</td>
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<tr>
<td>So, the number of pupils in Class I is now</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Promoted to Class VI</td>
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<td>Promoted to Class VII</td>
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<td>So, the number of pupils in Class II is now</td>
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<td>Promoted to Class V</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoted to Class VI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoted to Class VII</td>
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<td>So, the number of pupils in Class III is now</td>
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<td>Promoted to Class V</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoted to Class VI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoted to Class VII</td>
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<td>Promoted to Class VIII</td>
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<tr>
<td>So, the number of pupils in Class IV is now</td>
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<td>Pupils admitted to Class V</td>
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<td>So, the number of pupils in Class V is now</td>
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</table>

118 "Rapporto", p. 6. Very strangely, Mr. Slythe’s name does not appear as a Committee member, but only in the subscribers’ list.
119 Id., p. 7.
120 Id., ibid.
121 Id., ibid.
122 Id., ibid.
123 Id., ibid.
124 Idem, p. 8.
125 Id., ibid.
Regardless of these teething troubles, the Committee stated with considerable pride that 200 children, who would otherwise have grown up in ignorance, idleness and vice, were being civilized so that they would not, later on, become a public charge.\textsuperscript{132}

In order fully to assess the advantages accruing to the whole Maltese community from the Society's work, the Committee stated, one must only envisage the day when the present-day pupils will pass on the knowledge and manners they had learned in school to their children and these, in turn, to their own children. What a different social picture would this conjure up!

Egged on by their success, the Committee asked the educated section of the local community to pass an impartial judgement in favour of such a fledgling institution, and so help, together with their friends, to put the school on a more regular basis. They pointed out that, despite all their efforts, the Reading Lessons were still incomplete, and those of Arithmetic were still handwritten – all because of lack of funds.\textsuperscript{133}

Finally, the Committee were pleased to note that their initiative was bearing fruit even outside Valletta, for a provisional committee had been elected in Zejtun whose aim was to form a society that would make it its duty to open a similar school for poor children in their locality. The Committee's great wish and hope were that other, well-meaning, and altruistic persons in other villages would imitate such an example so that eventually there would not be in all Malta and Gozo a single boy or girl who would be deprived of the benefits of an elementary education.\textsuperscript{134}

The Society's first report also gave details of their revenue and expenditure for that current year, viz:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
\textbf{REVENUE} & \\ \hline
Contributions & donations, Scudi & 2838.2.0 \\
Students paying 6 tari monthly & 32.0.0 \\
Total & 2870.2.0 \textsuperscript{135} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{126} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{129} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Idem, pp. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{131} Idem, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{132} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Id., ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} Idem, p. 10.
Table 10

EXPENDITURE
To furnish the boys’ school, Scudi .............................................. 1010.11.10
To furnish the girls’ school, Scudi ............................................... 426.01.02
Slates, pencils, lessons, prizes .................................................. 340.09.05
Male teacher’s salary ............................................................. 850.00.00
Female teacher’s salary ......................................................... 128.00.00
Deposited with the Anglo-Maltese Bank .................................... 114.04.03
.................................................................................. 2755.09.17
.................................................................................. 2870.02.00

These accounts were signed by Mr. Bell, the Treasurer, and dated 15th October, 1820.136

When the Committee Members, Thomas Mac Gill and G.N. Premuda audited and closed the accounts they confirmed that the Society had a credit balance of Scudi 114.04.03.137

RISE AND DECLINE OF THE ‘NORMAL SCHOOLS’

As already stated, the success of the Society and its Valletta schools prompted the opening of the two other schools in Zejtun, one for boys and the other for girls. The motive power behind this village movement was, apparently, the Spanish consul for Malta, Chevalier Don Alberto Megino, who even pulled down a small, private theatre in his own house to provide the timber required for the addition of an extra room in the school “which had been erected chiefly by himself”138.

In 1829, the school was still shedding its limited but highly beneficent light under the direction of Fr. Luigi Camilleri, who seems to have worked very hard to make the school succeed139. His efforts were rewarded for as from 1st February, 1825, the government began to pay him a salary of £2.10 per month140.

This move by the government was quite surprising when one considers that in England itself no government had ever made any financial provisions for elementary education prior to 1833 when, by a Parliamentary resolution, it was decided that

136 Idem, p. 11.
137 Id., ibid.
138 Sheridan Wilson, Samuel, op. cit., pp. 136-137.
139 DeBono, Joseph, op. cit., p. 52.
140 Id., ibid.

...a sum, not exceeding twenty thousand pounds, be granted ... in aid of Private Subscriptions for the Erection of School Houses, for the Education of the Children of the Poorer Classes in Great Britain...”141

Meanwhile, the girls’ school in Zejtun was also in operation, and its teacher was paid a salary of £1.18.4d by the government, in addition to her wages from the Society142.

The local government seems to have been infected by the generosity and altruism shown in the erection of the four schools, for it went beyond helping with the teachers’ salaries. In fact, in order further to help the Society, the “Vocabolario Inglese”, Parts I and II, as well as “Fables and other short stories”, all for use in the Normal Schools, were printed free of charge at the Government Printing Press, in 1830 and 1832 respectively. Six hundred copies of each were printed and sold for the Society’s benefit143. It does not seem that any attempt was made to teach Maltese, probably because there were no text-books in the language up to 1824, except for ‘Taghlim Nisran’, translated from Italian by Francesco Wzzino144, and two other books, one by Francesco Vella, entitled “Chtieb il Kari Yau Daha’ a’ ilisien Malti”, published in 1824, and the other by G. Montebello Pulis, under the title “Trattat Fuq l’Obblighi Tal-Bnedem”, printed in 1826145.

The English Methodist missionary, Rev. J. Keeling, is also reputed to have procured and printed translations of some elementary works in Maltese146, but it is not known when such works were printed.

Meanwhile, the number of students in the schools went on increasing, so that in 1828, the government had appropriated a big house at No. 178 St. Christopher Street, in Valletta, to serve as a school instead of the original building which had become increasingly overcrowded147. In 1828, too, probably encouraged by the success of the Zejtun schools, the government opened another school in Gozo148. The teacher in charge was Dr. Luigi Pace who, however, was soon succeeded by Francesco Saverio Muscat. The salary given was 50 scudi per annum149. Fifty pupils

142 DeBono, Joseph, iust supra, loc. cit.
146 Sheridan Wilson, Samuel, op. cit., p. 100.
148 Id., ibid.
were to be admitted, of whom 35 were to pay no fees; the other 15 paying only a nominal fee for the teacher’s salary. Each village had the right to send a number of children in proportion to its population.

To arouse the interest and motivation of the pupils in these schools, Prize Days were held every six months, at which very often the Governor or his representative attended. For instance, on 31st January, 1823, the Lieutenant Governor, who had accepted the chairmanship of the Society, distributed the prizes, after having presided over the annual General Meeting of the paying members. On Friday, 18th February, 1825, The Marquis of Hastings was again scheduled to attend the General Meeting, while his consort was to hand out the ‘premiers’ to the girls.

Within ten years, the Society could rightly boast that no less than 1088 boys and 893 girls had been educated in their two Valletta schools alone, but the wave of philanthropy which had helped the Society in its initial efforts began to subside, and impassioned pleas began to appear for donations according to one’s means. Very significantly, too, the number of Maltese Members on the Committee of eighteen had dwindled to six.

But luckily for the Society and for Maltese education in general, there never was in these islands the church-state conflict that existed in both England and elsewhere. Certainly, at first the Catholic church rightly remained aloof, because of the well-founded suspicion that, at least some, of the British enthusiasm for the education of the masses was nothing but a ruse to proselytize the islanders’ children. Soon, however, even these suspicions began to fade, and when, in the General Meeting held on 5th February, 1833, Governor Ponsonby proposed that Rear Admiral Briggs be elected Chairman, and the Archdeacon of the Cathedral, Dr. Don Salv. Falzon, and Protestant clergymen, Rev. John Cleugh, be elected Vice-Chairmen of the Society, the suggestions were unanimously accepted, and all three nominees accepted their positions.

In 1834, the government decided to help the Society still further by “opening a Normal School in the Three Cities.” Its first teacher, Rev. Fr. Fortunato Panzavecchia, was later destined to be the first Director of “Elementary Education” in Malta.

The school started operations in July, 1834, at Senglea. Besides the 3R’s, it provided instruction in English, Italian, Character-Training and Elementary Navigation. This incidentally shows that English, too, had begun to feature in the Normal Schools!

Government Expenditure on these schools had now risen to £400 annually, distributed as follows:

Valletta schools .................................................. £250
Senglea schools .................................................. £100
Gozo schools .................................................. £ 50

It is rather curious that no figures are cited for the schools at Zejtun!

Despite all these efforts, however, the instruction that was imparted could only be very limited indeed, and when the Austin-Lewis Commission came to Malta, they found that there were only 450 boys and 278 girls attending the Valletta and Senglea schools, whereas in Gozo, the number was “inconsiderable.”

Again, no numbers are cited for the Zejtun Schools, but a writer alleges that they catered for 45 boys and 30 girls.

The Commissioners decry the instruction given in all these schools, describing it as “small in quantity and bad in quality.” Nor was this an exaggeration, for a British resident on the Island at the time echoed these words, saying that “in regard to mental culture”, the Normal schools had “effected next to nothing.”

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150 Id., ibid.
151 Id., ibid.
152 M.G.G., No. 552, Jan. 28th, 1823, p. 3370.
153 M.G.G., No. 725, Feb. 9th, 1825, p. 47.
154 M.G.G’s, No. 935, Jan. 14th, 1829, ut supra, loc. cit. and No. 1150, Feb. 13th, 1833, pp. 54-55.
155 DeBono, Joseph, op. cit., p. 57.
157 M.G.G. No. 1150, Feb. 13th, 1833 p. 54.
159 Mangion, Mary C., op. cit., p. 33.
160 M.G.G., No. 1429, April 25th, 1838, p. 163.
161 “Copies or Extracts of Reports of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Affairs of the Island of Malta and of Correspondence thereupon”, 1838, Part II, p. 41. (Henceforth referred to as “Extracts”.
162 Mangion, Mary, C., op. cit., p. 34.
163 “Extracts”, op. cit., p. 42.
a Maltese witness before the Commission had this to say: "... in casal Musta, not
more than 50 of its 3,734 inhabitants can read"165. Nor was this pathetic situation
limited to Mosta, for according to the Commissioners, only "About 1,764 persons,
including the clergy, can read and write in the casals; in Gozo about 350"166. One
need only, perhaps, quote the figures annexed to his answers to the Commissioners
by the Honourable Agostino Portelli to realize the full extent of the general illiteracy
prevailing at the time. Out of a total population of 115,570 people in the whole
archipelago, 99,384 were "in a state of ignorance"167.

It is, therefore, against this background that one has to evaluate the achieve-
ments of the Normal Schools' Society. Only thus, despite the criticisms levelled at
it, would we be in a position really and honestly to state that "one cannot but feel
grateful to the Normal Schools Society, for it was due to its well-meaning efforts that
education was opened to the lower classes of the people"168. Certainly, few people
would deny that thanks to the Society's doggedness in the face of difficulties, the
way was paved "for popular education, because after the visit of the Royal
Commissioners to Malta, the Normal Schools were taken entirely into the hands of
the Government", and they were, therefore "the tiny seeds from which grew the
great number of schools known to-day as the Government Primary Schools"169. In
fact, even a Director of Education admitted as much, saying: "The beginnings
of elementary education in Malta are due to a private society – the Normal School
Society – founded in 1819"170.

Despite its highly commendable efforts, however, the Society could not provide
a gratuitous system of education for all the children in a community that was, in its
majority, living at subsistence level. For, only free schools could possibly entice the
children of the really poor. After all, even the wife of one of the Commissioners,
Mrs. Sarah Austen – probably the greatest benefactress in the history of Maltese
education – admitted that it was "impossible to make the Maltese pay a grano (i.e.
about 1/4 of a farthing) a week: they would not send their children to school"171. A
Maltese educationist expressed the same view: "The Maltese parents could not pay
for the education of their children"172.

166 Idem, Part III, p. 12.
167 Id., ibid. Footnote.
168 Mangion, Mary C., op. cit., p. 35.
169 Id., ibid.
170 Laferla, A.V., "The Dawn of Elementary Education in Malta", in "The Malta Chronicle",
No. 11236, May 9th, 1931, p. 4
172 Mangion, Mary C., op. cit. p. 39.
Current Maltese coinage includes:
1 Maltese Lira base metal coin each equivalent to 100 cents;
1 50-cent base-metal coin;
1 25-cent base-metal coin;
1 10-cent base-metal coin;
1 2-cent base-metal coin; and
1 1-cent copper coin, each equivalent to 10 mils;
There were also 5-, 3- and 2-mil coins but they have now virtually disappeared.

SOME EXAMPLES OF EQUIVALENCE:
one pound sterling was equivalent to 12 scudi, and a shilling was equal to 7 tari and 4 grani. A penny (1d) was worth 12 grani.

In terms of current Maltese money, 1 penny was equal to 4 mils, and a shilling equal to 25 cents.

On the other hand, 1 scudo is equal to 8 cents 3 mils, and 1 tari would be equal to almost 7 mils.
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**Note:**

N.B. — Fine Decorazioni di nome privato di Sir W. Swinburne. Scudi sono stati ricevuti che non oltre il 50% registrati nella presente Lista.