

indeed, did not cease to be a bone of contention until September 7, 1800, when it was delivered up to the English forces under the command of Major-General Pigot. History tells us that its earliest inhabitants were the Phœnicians, from whom it is generally thought it derived the name Melita (Malta), from the excellent honey found there. At a later period Carthaginians and Greeks disputed over it, and for some time they exercised a kind of joint ownership. The Romans were the next to occupy the island.

In the year 56 A.D., St. Paul, who had been imprisoned at Cæsarea, was wrecked on the coast whilst on his way to Rome to appeal against his imprisonment. The saint remained three months on the island, and converted the inhabitants to Christianity. Years later, the Saracens invaded and subdued the island, to be expelled in their turn by Count Roger of Sicily. The turbulent history continues. First the Germans, next the French, established themselves there. It was not until 1530, when the Emperor Charles V. handed the island over to the knights of St. John, that any secure form of government obtained. This distinguished order of knights traces its origin to the middle of the eleventh century. It was a religious association, presided over by a grand master, and made up of members from various nations. Here we are mainly concerned with the work it achieved in Malta.

On October 25, 1530, Grand Master L'Isle Adam, with several members of the order, landed in Malta from Rhodes. Their advent was the beginning of a peaceful and prosperous period. The first matter of importance to which the order directed its attention was the fortifying of the island against possible incursions. In 1566, the City of Valetta was founded, on Mount Sceberras, by the Grand Master La Valette, and in this great work the inhabitants displayed great ingenuity. La Valette died in 1568, and the work continued under the Grand Mastership of De Mont; and was completed in 1571.

The defence of the various portions of the island was entrusted to the knights of England, France, Italy, Castile, Germany, Arragon, and Auvergne. Outworks and fortifications were built from time to time. Fort St. Michael, which is on the opposite side of the grand harbour, was erected by the Grand Master Claudio della Seniglea from whom the town of Seniglea takes its name. Further fortifications were constructed in 1638, a Dominican Friar with a turn for engineering being sent by the Pope for the express purpose. Grand Master Manoel devoted his energies to strengthening the harbors of Marsa Muscetto and Lazzaretto.

The City of Valetta.

The city of Valetta is remarkable for many beautiful buildings, and these also owe their origin to the Order. Hospitals were opened, and medical and surgical attendance given gratis to the poor, the knights superintending the administration, at the same time attending to the sick. In 1760 a building, then known as the Conservatory, was opened as a library, a gift of 9700 volumes being made by Bailly de Tenein. A large number of these buildings are now used as Government offices.

Some Ancient Customs.

Some of the ancient customs of the people are not without interest. It was, says an early history, the custom of the Grand Master, on the last day but one of the carnival, to give an entertainment to the people in the great square of Valetta. Some large beams of wood were erected in front of the Palace, the intervals of which were filled with rope ladders suspended to them. The whole was covered with branches of trees, on which were placed living animals and birds, garlands and oranges. This fabric was terminated by a globe of linen, on which was raised the figure of Fame holding in her hand a banner with the arms of the Grand Master. The square was filled with the populace, and a personage armed with a staff was there to prevent the people from running at the prize. Battles were frequently the consequence of the scrambling, and the man who first reached the figure of Fame was presented with a prize. When he raised the standard to carry it to the Grand Master the globe of linen divided, and a number of pigeons were disclosed.

Quaint ceremonies attended the celebration of marriage. When the dower had been agreed upon by the parents of the contracting parties the young man sent to his intended bride a present of fish surrounded with garlands, and in the mouth of the fish was placed the ring. The mothers of the bride and bridegroom repaired to a small room, and there prepared a compound of aromatic plants mixed with salt and honey, with which the lips of the bride were anointed, that the words flowing from them might become pleasant and persuasive. But these are ancient customs, and have no doubt fallen into desuetude.

The Island and its Inhabitants.

Malta is situated in the Mediterranean, 60 miles south of Sicily, and 180 north of Africa. It has a magnificent natural harbor. The population amounts to about 225,000. In 1800, the estimated population was 80,000. Since then improved sanitation has considerably decreased the death rate, while religion has kept up the birth rate as high as ever. About 5000 women earn their living by the manufacture of Maltese lace; almost all women work lace for their own use.

The Maltese of the present day are strict Catholics, and enthusiastic observers of all festivals, feasts, and ceremonies. Out of the civil population of close on 205,000, about 1500 belong to the secular and regular clergy, and about 500 women belong to different religious Orders. There are 27 religious houses of men and 36 convents and institutes of religious women. The beautiful Cathedral of St. John is built on the highest point of Valetta.

Faith and Piety of the People.

Monsignor Heylen, the president of the permanent committee for Eucharistic Congresses, proceeded to Malta for the preliminary arrangements in October last. On his return to Luxemburg he said to a newspaper representative:—'Never have I been so edified as I was during my sojourn at Malta. Nowhere, in the course of my numerous peregrinations, have I ever met a population so fundamentally Christian, practising their religion so frankly. The island of Malta contains barely the same number of inhabitants as Luxemburg. And all the people—men, women, and children—daily attend holy Mass. There are very early morning services, at which all the working men attend before going to work. These services are followed by others during the morning, which are attended by all classes; at nine o'clock, in particular, is the Cathedral Mass, which is attended by all the officials and employees of the Government. Frequent Communion is resorted to by a large number of persons. The men do not content themselves, as is too often the case with us, with attending Communion at Easter and other great festivals; they go each month or oftener, each week very often. When the Holy Sacrament is taken to the sick, even if it is at night, the bells ring, the inhabitants get up, light up their houses, and a crowd goes out to accompany the priest as far as the sick person's residence; after that, they return in procession to the church to receive the Benediction of the Holy Sacrament. I had occasion many times to pass through the streets, in rich and poor quarters of the capital. Whether I went on foot or in a carriage, each time the passers-by stopped, remarking, "The Bishop," and bowed or knelt to receive the benediction.

Religion in the Schools.

'In the schools—where the teaching is in Italian, English, and Maltese conjointly—religion occupies the place of honor in the programme, and the teachers show zeal and intelligence in teaching the catechism and sacred history; they teach, and cause to be daily recited, all the principal prayers. In the course of certain months, they recite, in addition, some special prayers to the Virgin or to the Sacred Heart. All the newspapers read are Catholic. In them one never finds a disrespectful phrase or word about the Catholic religion, dogma, ministers, etc. There is not a single bad journal in the island. And those from elsewhere are firmly proscribed by the Maltese themselves. Everything there is pleasing. Have I not reason to tell you that rarely is it given to a foreign visitor to feel such joy, such occasion for edification?'

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