



PART ONE

GIUSEPPE DONATI

CHAPTER 1

A one-man battle against Mussolini

When the echelons of St. Edward College in Malta decided to fill the post of master of Italian for their institution with a native Italian, they had an indelible and explicit unwritten condition in mind. The candidate had to be not only Catholic but unquestionably of pure anti-fascist breed. The choice fell on Giuseppe Donati who fitted impeccably into this prerequisite. Although there were several scholars in Malta whose academic profile matched, and maybe even outshined, that of Giuseppe Donati, none had such anti-fascist credentials as Donati. In any event, most of the potentially accessible candidates were assumed to be pro-Italian and therefore, rightly or wrongly, perceived to be anti-British.

Political activity – the beginning

Giuseppe Donati was born in a working class family in Granarolo di Faenza on the 5 January 1889, the third of the five children born of Severo Donati and Domenica Baccarini. He grew culturally and politically in Faenza where he was admitted to the seminary of Faenza in 1903 where he remained till 1907. He was enrolled in the Istituto Superiore di Studi Sociali Cesare Alfieri of Firenze, where he met his future wife Vidya Morici. Even before being admitted to College, he actively participated in the formation of the Catholic political movement *Lega democratica nazionale*. The young student became actively involved in Catholic and lay journalism through writing in several papers including *L'Unità*, edited by his university lecturer Gaetano Salvemini (who was of Jewish faith). He also wrote in Giuseppe Prezzolini's¹ *La Voce* for which he was severely reprimanded by the Rector of the Seminary, Canon Francesco Lanzoni, for writing an article about the archaic cultural conditions



Gaetano Salvemini

of Faenza. Donati considered Salvemini's style of teaching unique in as far as he explained historical events devoid of the traditional approach of pedantic anecdotes. His professor would later grow to become the wandering Jew of anti-fascism acting as the unelected dean of anti-fascist resistance. Donati's bond with his master was tangible, and he was destined to remain close to him in personal tragedies and political battles. The Florentine aura was responsible for the positive formation of his character. *Cesare Alfieri* was the only institution in Italy at that time which provided a progressive outlook to life from the legal, political, economic and social aspects. After the unification of Italy,

and therefore the secession from the Papal States in 1861, Romagna was freed from the bondage of the Papal clerical rule. Urban areas were exceedingly anti-clerical while people were highly conservative in rural areas. Despite the fact that Donati was a particularly devout Christian, he severed links with the *ecclesiasticismo* – the traditionalist political activity orbiting around the Church curias. He believed in a democracy independent of the Catholic hierarchy but based on Christian values centreing on a social conscience that competed with other moderate political forces and, at the same time, keeping away from extreme ideologies.

The situation created by the outbreak of the First World War led to a great controversy among the Italian public opinion as to whether Italy should have entered the war siding with the Central Powers, to which Italy was allied or, alternatively, on the side of the Entente Powers. Although Donati was a pacifist at heart, he favoured Italy's involvement in the war against Austria-Hungary. As an *interventoista*, he proved to be generous and honest about his choice in serving his country 'as he had seen others in the war as a means to emancipation in the Christian sense also the working classes.² He expressed his feelings in the press especially in *L'Azione*. Throughout his life he happened to be in ambivalent (sometimes contradictory)

positions. His biographers Nicola Angiulli and Giacomo de Antonellis believed that Donati's adherence to war was a serious youthful error.³ A case in point was his admiration of the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, thus ultimately connected himself unconsciously to the warmonger whom he would later confront – Benito Mussolini. He enrolled as a volunteer in the Italian Army, rising to the rank of Captain and was awarded a *medaglia d'argento al valor militare*. Later on, he was decorated with the title of *Commendatore* in recognition of bravery displayed while in combat. He was in action fifty-three times, was seriously wounded, suffering some ten wounds; one of them grazed a lung and was the distant cause of his death. On one occasion he was actually captured by the Austrians and thrown out presumed dead. At one point, he was seriously wounded. During his convalescence in a military hospital in Florence he was treated by his own fiancé Vidya Morici. Thrice during his recovery, he was entrusted with the education of officer cadets.⁴ He was given leave to enable him to graduate in political and social sciences on 29 June 1916 when he was bestowed with a first class degree. Though he graduated as a lawyer, he did not practice the profession. On 8 July 1916 he married Morici, who gave birth to four children: Guido



Gabriele D'Annunzio



Vidya Morici



Giuseppe Donati in Army uniform.



Ugo Ojetti

who was called *Dodino* (Florence on 7 June 1917), *Severa*, – *Picci* (Venice on 28 February 1921)⁵, *Maria Grazia*, (Venice on 6 July 1923) and *Fiamma* (Rome on 19 February 1926).

On his return to the front, he was assigned to work at the Press Office under Ugo Ojetti. This office was responsible for disseminating propaganda among the soldiers aimed at keeping the morale high as well as the issuing of war bulletins. Ojetti, who was a journalist of the *Corriere della Sera*, was the author of the very last war bulletin addressed by General Armando Diaz announcing the end of hostilities after a forty-one month war. Ojetti shared with Donati a connection with Malta, where as a journalist he was a frequent visitor. He is attributed with the authorship of the often repeated phrase: *i maltesi vogliono la lingua di Dante, la religione di Roma e la sterlina di Londra*.⁶ (The Maltese sought Dante's language, the religion of Rome and the British pound sterling.) The liberal thinker, Piero Gobetti, remarked that Ojetti excelled in composing citations much more than forming up judgments.⁷ As a young soldier, Donati witnessed the carnage caused by the European conflict. He knew about the Vatican's secret peace initiatives. He supported the ending of the war provided that every nation must be free of domination from any other power and free to choose the type of government it wanted as decided by plebiscites.⁸



Benito Mussolini

The effect of Italy's entry in the war on the side of the Triple Entente changed radically the social fabric of the Italian kingdom. The Italian army fought some eleven battles in two years but succeeded in advancing a mere twelve kilometres along the Isonzo River. The peak of social discontent was reached with the outcome of the mutiny in the wake of the battle of Caporetto. Caporetto became embedded in the collective memory, not just a colossal defeat in military terms but as the sign of the collapse of the liberal state – a fact later exploited by the fascists. The Central Powers wiped Italians from the battlefield, capturing 300,000 soldiers, while approximately the same number deserted the field as if on a general strike. All wars, including this Great War, experienced desertions in Russia, Germany and Belgium. However, the magnitude of Italy's humiliation had far-reaching consequences. No less than 600,000 Italian soldiers were killed during this war. The aftermath of the European war was a period of great political, economic and social upheavals. One result out of the chaos that followed was that, while the *Risorgimento* united Italy, the war inspired the masses to break from the past in as far as they demonstrated that they were a force to be reckoned with. Subordination to the Establishment, irrespective of whether the authority was civilian or clerical, was severely ruptured for a long time to come.

Battle of Caporetto..



Pope Pius IX



Pope Leo XIII

Embracing the new catholic political movement

Following Italy's annexation of Rome in 1870, Pope Pius IX and his successors refused to recognize the nascent Kingdom of Italy. The Church considered Italy to have been the usurper of the Papal States. When he was very young, Donati was culturally attracted to the Catholic political movement *Lega Democratica Cristiana Nazionale* and socially linked to the teaching of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. This movement was led by a priest, Romolo Murri, who was eventually excommunicated but was later pardoned by Pope Pius XII. On his rupture with Murri, Donati became one of the founders of the party *Democrazia Cristiana Italiana* together with Eligio Cacciaguerra. When the latter was killed during the First World War, Donati took over the leadership of the party. After the cessation of hostilities, he moved from the Press Office of the High Command to act in a similar role in Venice as propagandist for the liberated lands of Trentino and Trieste. He was also responsible for directing the employment office of the municipal council in Venice.

The year 1919 was a year of great designs and reckless audacity.⁹ In the case of Europe, it was marked by Woodrow Wilson and the Peace Conference at Versailles. Two personalities emerged in the Italian political arena who, through their different ideologies, shaped history for a number of decades:



Don Luigi Sturzo

Benito Mussolini founded the first *fasci di combattimenti* while Don Luigi Sturzo was the founder of the *Partito Popolare Italiano* (PPI), the forerunner of Christian Democracy (Democrazia Cristiana). The PPI had a more definite programme and a more complete organisation than the earlier Catholic groupings. It developed rapidly under the guidance of its political secretary, the already-mentioned Sicilian priest Don Luigi Sturzo. It advocated reforms of a Christian-Socialist character such as the expropriation of the landed estates for the benefit of the peasants but, at the same time, compensating landlords.¹⁰ While several of the members of the *Lega*

followed Sturzo, Donati and the majority of his party did not. They felt that the new Catholic party was very much dominated by conservative elements. In due course, Sturzo succeeded in luring him out of the orbit of the *Lega*, launching Donati as candidate representing the Venice-Treviso voters in the 1921 elections. Although his attempt to enter parliament failed, yet Sturzo had absolute confidence in this promising and courageous journalist. He engaged him to edit the new newspaper *Il Popolo* with its first issue appearing on 5 April 1923. The PPI's semi-official organ was described as the idea of Don Luigi Sturzo with the aim of launching a newspaper which was purported to be the official expression of its political policy.¹¹

Italy was on the verge of a civil war while, conversely, it was manoeuvring itself into the transition to peace. Riots, strikes and scuffles between rival fascist and communist crowds of unemployed roaming in the streets like bulls at Pamplona were the order of the day. The Liberal governments were too weak to control such unemployed masses battling in the streets. Benito Mussolini had demanded the formation of a fascist government to restore order. After Mussolini geared up for a march on Rome consisting of some 50,000 fascists, he was offered and secured premiership in October 1922 without resistance from the Establishment. The fascist seizure of power had been greeted tacitly by several politicians, and rather openly by others.

The Liberals and the official Catholic Church tended to appease fascism as it was deemed to be a lesser evil than communism. Prior to the March on Rome, Donati was amongst other Catholic thinkers who guided gradually the Catholic electorate into a modern secular alternative – the *Partito Popolare*. Apart from working closely with Sturzo, he was drawn into a dialogue of the positive criticism of Piero Gobetti. Gobetti diagnosed the Catholic party which was made up of different factions right up to the survival of its successor down to the end, decades later, of the *prima repubblica*. He asserted that it represented one of the first steps towards the modern world, towards a world of freedom which was absolute, inflexible and inevitably contrary to the sacred intolerance of the papacy as well as against the closed world beyond dogma.¹² The Catholics moved from the tradition of blocking reform to full participation in the social and economic functions of the state, competing with other parties with diverse programme. It is in this climate that Donati culminated the publication of *Il Popolo*. Donati's personal editorial policy did not preclude people of various ideological traits from contributing to his paper. These included Piero Gobetti, Guido De Ruggiero, Guido Mancacarta, Nicolò Rodolico, (colleague of the philosopher Giovanni Gentile), Marc Sangnier of the French Christian Democratic movement, who used the medium of *Jeune République*, and the omnipresent historian Gaetano Salvemini. Occasionally, the philosopher and historian Benedetto Croce contributed to *Il Popolo* his thoughts about freedom and democracy. Yet the overriding agenda of Donati was to follow his guide, Sturzo, in adopting an uncompromising stand against the appeasement of fascism. *Il Popolo* under Donati was the torchbearer of resistance to fascist intolerance which was the basis of a totalitarian state on the rise. The paper had two fronts to combat: on the front page, Mussolini and, on the *terza pagina*, the clerico-fascist cliques. Even so, *Il Popolo* displayed a sign of national solidarity when it supported the Italian government's arbitrary invasion of Corfù in the latter part



Benedetto Croce

of 1923. Nevertheless, Donati's imitative was not appreciated by Mussolini's own paper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*. Mussolini himself sought a meeting with Donati in the early days of January 1923 to tell him he was not adverse to the new project of the publication of *Il Popolo*.¹³ However, in not so many words, he told him that he was entitled to his own opinion as long it agreed with his.

Even so, when the paper was eventually launched, Mussolini's own organ *Il Popolo d'Italia* on 30 August 1923 charged the new paper with the title 'enemy number one'. The typical heading 'Red subversion' was changed to words such as defeatist, social democrat, anti-national, and disgusting amongst other names.¹⁴ Donati was not short of adjectives either and called this outrage 'an incitement to crime'. When later on Mussolini summoned Donati to the seat of the Minister for the Interior, the *Viminale*, the *duce* did not lose time with introductory formalities. Though he appreciated the loyal position of *Il Popolo* over the Corfú incident, he went straight on the attack. In addition, he enticed Donati with offers of a comfortable life as deserving to such a competent editor in return for co-operation with the regime. Donati reciprocated the lack of formalities in the same way Mussolini did. He gave him the stunning answer: 'I have never changed sides' – *Non ho mai cambiato bandiera*. Soon after this meeting, it became clear that the regime was unwilling to tolerate a free press and this state of affairs was followed by the intensification of persecution.¹⁵



Don Giovanni Minzoni

Defending catholic Matteotti – Don Giovanni Minzoni

As time went by, the fascist revolution continued to weaken what was left of liberal democracy. Like his contemporaries, Donati witnessed at first hand several violent acts afflicting Italy but, unlike several others, he was not easily intimidated. He proved his point after the murder on 23 August 1923 of Don Giovanni Minzoni, archpriest of Argenta. Minzoni was the precursor of a political murder that shocked the fascist state – that of Giacomo

Matteotti. While Don Giovanni was outside the parish's oratory, he was assaulted by *squadristi* from Ferrara, beaten several times on the head and, as a result, died during the same night. This horrific and tragic episode was reported in the press but failed to attract any sort of national outcry though the episode shocked Emilia-Romagna. During the solemn funeral celebrated at St. Dominic Church in Minzoni's birthplace Ravenna, Don Giuseppe Sangiorgi repeated to the congregation the question people were asking as to why their pastor had been murdered though the answer was known to all and sundry. The archpriest was killed first because he was a priest but, more than that, because he was a *popolare*, and quite a popular *popolare*. He was active both in the Catholic Action and PPI circles. Much to the dismay of the local fascist *ras*, Donati was quick to denounce the assassination of the priest who, later on, became known as the *Matteotti cattolico*. He pointed an accusing finger to no less than Italo Balbo, one of the *quadrumviro* of the march on Rome. The editor of *Il Popolo* stood up in court in front of the judges of the VII criminal section on 28 November 1924. He exposed the fascist thugs as the perpetrators without fearing that he could end in a way similar to that of the martyr he was defending. Five persons were indicted but were freed after a few months due to absence of material proof. The intimidation of witnesses and the pressure exerted by fascist Minister of Justice Aldo Oviglio ensured the denial of justice. Still, Donati continued to insist that the responsibility lied with the person who initially ordered the brutal task. He spelled name and surname: Italo Balbo, stating explicitly that 'Balbo is just one of the many to blame but the principal person responsible in this affair is Mussolini.'¹⁶ Thanks to the joint pressure of *Il Popolo* and the Vatican's official organ *L'Osservatore*



Italo Balbo



Fascist Minister of Justice Aldo Oviglio

Romano, there was a re-trial of the Argenta aggression. However, though as a result Balbo was forced to relinquish his command of the militia, it was no more than just a pyrrhic victory. Donati's courageous account of what happened in Argenta has remained etched in stone for posterity:

When Don Minzoni spoke or wrote to others, he repeated several times that he trembled with the climate of intimidation surrounding him. He realized that a gang of fascists from Umbria, well-chosen thugs known in the area as *perugini*, were sent to Ferrara to settle accounts persuasively through the ruthless beating. One evening, while in the company of a young man, Don Minzoni was violently beaten to death. The two murderers were not immediately traced while the police officer who dealt with the case was transferred to another locality almost immediately. The names of the assassins were known and belonged to the militia of Casumaro Cento, part of the seventy-sixth legion of the national militia.¹⁷

The legal system was becoming gradually submissive to the whims of the regime. In fact, the perpetrators of the crime were duly absolved with the second trial ending in a farce. While the tragic episode became headlines also in the national press, public opinion was not sufficiently aroused. The climate in the country would change only with the experience of another occurrence which would shock democracy even further – the murder of the socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti within less than a year. This murder was to engage Donati's journalistic activity more belligerently and, in the end, would cost him his enforced departure from Italy, only to return dead a few years after the downfall of fascism.

World headlines in one day

After the March on Rome, Mussolini shared his government with other parties in parliament. Nonetheless, he paved the way to achieve a fascist majority through altering existing electoral laws to his advantage. In fact, he pressurized the majority of the deputies in parliament to vote in favour of a law, which became known after the person who drafted it, Giacomo Acerbo. This reform allotted a two thirds seat majority to the party that won most votes in a general election. Donati, together with some fellow *popolari* and a section of the free press, was opposed to this electoral law.

A journalist who stood in the path of Mussolini was Giovanni Giglio, son of the noted educator Alfonso. He was Enrico Mizzi's one time ally favouring *italianità* in Malta.¹⁸ Giglio was the Rome correspondent for most of the twenty years of fascist epoch for the British socialist paper *Daily Herald* until he was finally expelled from Italy during the Abyssinian War. During



Giacomo Matteotti



Emilio De Bono, Benito Mussolini, Italo Balbo and Cesare Maria De Vecchi during the 'March on Rome'

the 1924 elections, the Italian press campaigned frantically as it had done in every previous election. Giglio's exposure of Mussolini's authoritarian traits in the British press, and therefore to the English-speaking world at large, was not easily digestible for the *Duce*. Giglio was not able to witness, and therefore report on, the disorders associated with the April 1924 vote because he had been deported ahead of the elections. He was expelled 'on grounds of carrying out slanderous propaganda against the Government and against the dignity and prestige of Italy.'¹⁹ However, the real reason behind Mussolini's action was the British Labour Party's intention to send two Labour parliamentarians to witness the process of the elections. Mussolini did not want any foreign observers around. In due course, the regime discovered that it was easier to control Giglio and his array of contacts in Italy rather than people outside the Italian borders. Dino Grandi, Italy's Foreign Minister, invited Giglio for a chat at the *Claridge* while attending the Naval Conference in London in 1930 and invited Giglio to return to Rome with the assurance that, being a

journalist, he would be free from interference on his contributions for his paper. This assurance did not last very long.

The manipulations orchestrated with the Acerbo Law provided the victory Mussolini expected. As if this was not enough, the campaign was stained with extensive violence, thus making a mockery of the principle of free elections. The corrupt practices exercised by the fascists were vigorously denounced in Parliament on 30 May 1925 by the socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti, one of the most talented of the younger generation of socialists. His socialism was of the pragmatic non-revolutionary variety and, from the very beginning; he was a natural opponent of the flamboyant Mussolini.²⁰ Giglio knew personally the socialist deputy as he had been a witness to history when Matteotti was present during the destruction of the printing press where both the Democratic *L'Epoca* and the Socialist *Avanti* papers were printed after the latter's press had been previously destroyed by fascist thugs.²¹ Matteotti, through his determination, had succeeded in rebuilding and reorganizing the Party out of the ruins that remained of it after the devastation of four years of civil war.²²

Matteotti spoke resolutely in his last address to Parliament on 30 May 1924, defending fearlessly the sovereignty of the Italian people in a way as if he was speaking at Westminster and not in Montecitorio. This speech should have lasted an hour but with constant heckling, whistling and banging of fists, it lasted four hours. When he said that the election had not been free because of violence and intimidation and had been rigged, there was pandemonium.²³ After he ended his speech, Matteotti turned to his friends, telling them to get ready for his funeral and prepare the proper tribute.²⁴ Therefore, it was absolutely clear when he did not turn up for the sitting of 10 June 1924, that he had paid dearly for his guts. He had been abducted and it was later discovered that he was assassinated. Matteotti's body was found thinly covered with a thicket close to the road. It was largely eaten by wolves and it was only a gold-filled tooth in the skull permitted identification.²⁵ The news of this political assassination made headlines in the international press. One such report stated that 'the amazing circumstances of the crime and the splendid character of the victim so seized the popular imagination that it is no exaggeration to state that Giacomo Matteotti after his death became the object of a kind of religious cult for millions of Italians.'²⁶

Donati's rearguard action against fascism, following Giacomo Matteotti's murder, resulted in a boomerang for the *Popolo's* editor as well as for his party's commitment for the defence of parliamentary democracy in Italy. As Mussolini biographer Nicholas Farrell put it, 'Italy was a country where



Giacomo Matteotti's speech in Parliament

the conspiracy theorist was often right'.²⁷ Giuseppe Donati was the principal Catholic journalist who was first in denouncing passionately Matteotti's disappearance. Within hours of the occurrence, Donati pronounced unequivocally: 'It is now clear that Matteotti was kidnapped for reasons connected with the exercise of his political mandate. All we ask is for justice and transparency about those responsible.'²⁸ The Matteotti imbroglio was challenging the very survival of the regime which had struggled to consolidate its hold on the government during the past election, thanks to the Acerbo Law. Most of the opposition parties acted fast, first by boycotting Parliament and then by setting on 27 June an assembly which became known as *l'Aventino*. Other moves followed. On 4 November the veteran statesman Giovanni Giolitti withdrew his support to government. The *Aventino* opposition had hoped that the outcry over the slaying of Matteotti would have provided



Fellow Socialists search for Matteotti outside Rome. His corpse was found two months and ten days after being murdered by Mussolini's black shirts.

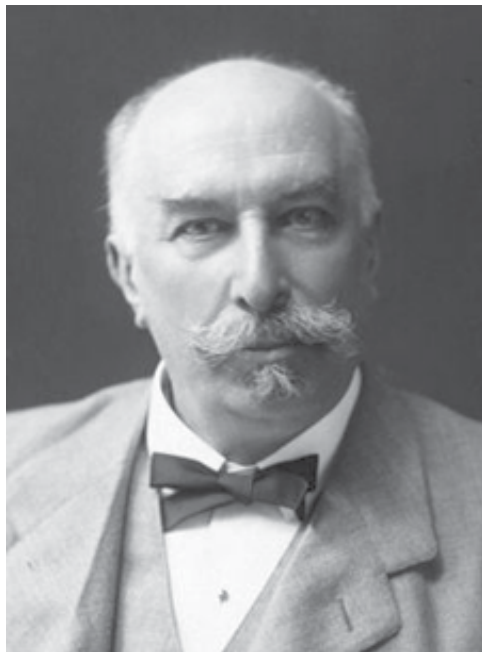


Matteotti's body being carried away at Stazione Mentana, outside Rome on its way to Fratta Polesine, Matteotti's home town.

King Vittorio Emanuele III with the opportunity to dismiss Mussolini. In that case, elections would follow. This did not happen.

The *Corriere della Sera*, the Milanese paper considered as representing the pulse of the nation, immediately began hammering about the silencing of a fierce opponent of the regime. Rather than publishing the revelations discovered about the assassination, it provided the information to Donati, who in turn reproduced them in *Il Popolo*. The *Corriere della Sera* daily commented on the following day on what the Catholic paper reported.²⁹ The fiery young journalist had no qualms in reporting fascist brutality with his paper identifying 172 aggressions, 45 ransacking of opponents' properties, 25 serious injuries together with 16 murders.

Soon after the disappearance of the socialist deputy, the liberal leader Giovanni Amendola commemorated Matteotti on 28 June 1924 at the same place where *Il Popolo* was printed. The opposition came in the possession of a sworn statement by Cesare Rossi, formerly Mussolini's close aide. The disclosure exposed the extent of fascist complicity in the murder. Donati did not wait for the King to act against Mussolini, so he took the liberty to formally charge General Emilio De Bono³⁰ with involvement in the murder and demanded his trial before the Senate turned Court of Justice.³¹ Conversely, Procurator-General Giovanni Santori called to stay the proceeding for all the



Giovanni Giolitti




General Emilio De Bono

N. 14 Firenze - Giugno 1925

NON MOLLARE

Bollettino d'informazioni durante il "regime fascista",
Chi riceve il bollettino è moralmente impegnato a farlo circolare



NUMERO SPECIALE PER MATTEOTTI
MATTEOTTI

Matteotti non fu il primo assassinato dai fascisti e non fu l'ultimo. Altre vittime lo precedettero. Altre lo seguirono. Altre lo seguiranno fino a quando il popolo italiano non sia degno di ritornare alle consuetudini della vita civile, che non ammettono l'assassinio politico, e che danno alla sola legge, superiore a tutti ed egua e per tutti, l'ufficio della punizione.

Ma fra tutte le vittime del fascismo, noi onoriamo specialmente Matteotti, perchè non mollò. Perchè dette all'Italia l'esempio di non transigere con Mussolini. Perchè ebbe il coraggio di sfidare a viso aperto Mussolini. Perchè fu fatto assassinare da Mussolini appunto perchè non transigeva e perchè aveva un coraggio che mancava a troppi altri.

Ecco perchè Matteotti è divenuto il simbolo di tutti coloro che vogliono ricondurre l'Italia sulla via della libertà e della giustizia.

MUSSOLINI IL MANDANTE

— Filippelli racconta nel Memoriale che Dumini gli dichiarò di avere agito in conformità di ordini precisi di Rossi e Marinelli, autorizzati formalmente da Mussolini; Rossi gli disse che Mussolini sapeva tutto; lui (Rossi) e Marinelli avevano dato ordini in seguito ad accordi con l'on. Mussolini; bisognava ad ogni costo mettere a tacere la cosa, diversamente saltava lo stesso Mussolini; Dumini e gli altri esecutori avevano parlato con Mussolini nella giornata di mercoledì (indomani dell'assassinio di Matteotti); Mussolini aveva ricevuto carte e passaporto dell'on. Matteotti: a prova della sua sparizione.

— Filippelli mente, dichiarano gli amici di Mussolini.

— Ebbene, ecco il Memoriale scritto da Cesare Rossi il 14 giugno mentre teme di essere fatto assassinare da Mussolini, ed ecco la lettera del 14 giugno mandata da Cesare Rossi a Mussolini per annunziargli che il Memoriale è pronto e consegnato a mani sicure, e quindi se Rossi fosse assassinato non per questo la sua voce accusatrice cesserebbe. Nel Memoriale e nella lettera, Cesare Rossi ci fa sapere che « tutto quanto è successo è avvenuto sempre per la volontà diretta, o con l'approvazione, o con la complicità del Duce ». La bastonatura di Amendola fu ordinata da Mussolini a De Bono; la bastonatura Misuri fu organizzata da Balbo per suggerimento di Mussolini; la aggressione Forni fu ordinata da Mussolini a Rossi ed organizzata da Giunta; la dimostrazione contro casa Nitti e contro le opposizioni furono ordinate da Mussolini; la distruzione dei circoli cattolici in Brianza fu ordinata da Mussolini; la situazione conseguente all'assassinio Matteotti fu creata esclusivamente da Mussolini, il quale non riuscì poi a combinare con Rossi un piano di difesa, che soddisfacesse quest'ultimo.

— Anche Cesare Rossi mente.

— Piano. Cesare Rossi scrive indipendentemente da Filippelli. E i due uomini si trovano d'accordo nell'attribuire a Mussolini il mandato per l'assassinio di Matteotti. Eppoi c'è dell'altro. C'è il testamento scritto da Finzi il 13 giugno, quando Finzi temeva anche lui di essere fatto assassinare dal Duce. Il documento non è stato ancora pubblicato; ma tutti sappiamo che in quel testamento Finzi afferma che la Ceka la costituì Mussolini in persona nel gennaio del 1924 e la teneva alle sue dipendenze dirette, e Dumini era l'esecutore delle imprese più rischiose comandate dal Duce. E anche Finzi scrive senza sapere quel che Filippelli e Rossi scrivono ognuno per conto proprio. I tre uomini che sono in grado di sapere, denunciano tutti Mussolini, indipendentemente l'uno dall'altro.

— Mentono tutti e tre indipendentemente l'uno dall'altro. E se si trovano d'accordo tutti ad accusare Mussolini, è una combinazione.

— Ma c'è un quarto testimone: Francesco Giunta segretario generale del Partito fascista prima di Farinacci, incomincia la lettera, in cui ordina che Forni sia stangato, con la formula: *Presi gli ordini dal Presidente del Consiglio e Duce del Fascismo. Ecco confermata una delle affermazioni che si trovano nel Memoriale Rossi e nel testamento Finzi. E c'è un quinto testimone: Vico Perrone, capo manipolo della Milizia Nazionale, racconta che, ricevuto l'ordine di pro-*

The June 1925 edition of the journal *Non Mollare* published by such intellectuals such as Carlo and Nello Rosselli explicitly accused Mussolini of organizing Matteotti's murder.



Donati's battle on *Il Popolo* for the discovery of nothing but the whole truth.

GEN. DEBONO FREED IN MATTEOTTI CASE

Dr. Donati, Who Accused Him of Complicity in Deputy's Murder, Flees Italy.

Copyright, 1925, by The Chicago Tribune Co.

ROME, June 13.—The trial of the Fascisti for the murder of Giacomo Matteotti, Socialist leader and Deputy, which has been postponed for a year, seemed nearer today when it was unofficially announced that the Debono case, which was considered a curtain raiser, had been completed. The press announces that General Debono has been found innocent.

Dr. Giuseppe Donati, editor of the Catholic paper *Il Popolo* today fled from Italy. He brought the charges against General Debono of complicity

In the kidnapping and assassination of Deputy Matteotti.

The verdict is causing great excitement. Politicians believe it portends the quashing of the entire Matteotti trial because Dr. Donati presented evidence for introduction during the trial of the five men accused of slaying the Deputy. General Debono, who is still a Senator, formerly was Director-General of Police and Commander-in-Chief of the Black Shirts. He was accused of being behind the shooting and clubbing of former Minister Amendola, now the leader of the opposition.

Dr. Donati's banishment was decreed by Secretary Farinacci of the Fascisti some weeks ago when the Fascist press predicted that the verdict of the Senators who were trying General Debono would be vindication.

According to a report current today, Sigior Analo, former Minister of Education, hearing that Farinacci intended to scare Dr. Donati out of Italy, went to Minister Federonzi of the Interior and asked him to protect the editor's life. Federonzi replied that he would do his full duty, but would not guarantee protection for Dr. Donati or the Catholic newspaper plant. According to reports, Federonzi suggested that Dr. Donati leave Italy, offering a passport.

'The New York Times' reports that 'Giuseppe Donati flees from Italy', 14 June 1925.

sixteen charges pleaded by Donati.³² De Bono was also one of the *quadrumviro* of the March on Rome. Donati went ahead with his course of action in spite of the fact that the sages of the *Aventino* were not at all enthusiastic about the move – considered to be a political suicide. At this juncture, Donati's precipitation at the Senate at a time when the magistrates were in a well advanced stage of arraigning the culprits torpedoed the judicial process. When the President of the Senate inquiring committee, Niccoló Melodia, summoned Magistrate Mauro del Giudice, the latter appropriately enough refused to divulge the stage of the conclusions of the judicial investigations. But a commission set up by a Senate controlled by a regime that was in serious difficulties could not be counted upon for its sense of justice. Therefore, it was not all that difficult to guess what judgment the Senate turned Court of Justice would deliver.

Donati runs for his life

As was widely expected, the judgment delivered by the Senate absolved De Bono outright. The zeal shown by the Donati's battle demanding *luce e giustizia* proved to be counter-productive. It ended up by harming the *raison d'être* of the goals of the Catholic press by confusing the approach of two magistrates investigating the murder as being prudent weakness.³³ Such was the view held by some at that time as well as several years later.

Newspapers in Italy and abroad carried the news of the judgment with great prominence on 27 June 1925. Donati was advised not to tarry unduly but to take the first train and get out of Italy as fast as he could. Therefore, when the news was cabled through the four corners of the world, he was already out of the sight of the *squadristi* who, in all probability, would have had no scruples to add yet another victim to follow the two illustrious persons Donati had so fearlessly defended.

One of the more fanatic protagonists of the fascist movement Roberto Farinacci followed up the Matteotti saga with inflammatory rhetoric through his newspaper *Cremona nuova*. He openly encouraged reprisals against Donati in the probability of De Bono's acquittal. The leaders of the PPI were alarmed with the potential violent ramifications of having Donati around. Under the circumstances, Donati had no other option but to flee from Italy to save his life. His family had lost their beloved son Guido, probably at the time when he needed urgent hospitalization, which was denied to Donati after he had exposed De Bono.³⁴ His personal safety and that of his family became the most important priority at that appalling moment of his life.

On the other hand, Luigi Federzoni was appointed Minister of the Interior in June 1924 (replacing De Bono) with the pretext 'to give the country the illusion that the fascist thugs were being brought under discipline.'³⁶ He was not willing to see another martyr so soon after Matteotti's assassination. Consequently, he consented to a request by the PPI deputy Antonio Anile³⁶ who, unlike other Sturzo followers, had not taken part in the *Aventino* protest.³⁷ While the Minister 'would not guarantee protection for Dr. Donati of the Catholic newspaper plant,'³⁸ still he offered to produce a passport within half an hour should the young journalist opt to leave Italy immediately. Federzoni was convinced that the fascists would not hesitate to harm Donati. What was hanging in the balance at that crucial moment was not the protection of Donati but preserving his ministerial post.³⁹ In spite of the fact that the writing was on the wall, Donati was initially hesitant to accept the advice to leave for France. He still held the illusion of a possible return to Italy when the coast was clear. In fact, no replacement was appointed for his post at *il Popolo*. Donati construed Federzoni's offer of a passport valid for travel to all countries in Europe as a clear sign that he was really in danger.⁴⁰ But more than shielding Donati, Federzoni was really interested in getting out of the way an unrestrained journalist who was frustrating the fascist design to annihilate the freedom of the press. Federzoni ensured not only that Donati would never return to Italy but that his pregnant wife would remain in Italy permanently.

On the fateful day when the *Popolo d'Italia* announced in full blast the acquittal of General De Bono – 12 June 1925 – Donati was on his way to Paris accompanied by fellow journalist Guido Armando Grimaldi. They were, however, stopped by the police at the border town of Bardonecchia (90 kilometres from Torino) on the pretext that Donati's passport had no personal photograph attached. While originally the local police had received specific instructions from the Police chief in Rome, Crispo Moncada, not to molest



Luigi Federzoni, Minister of the Interior

Donati as he crossed the border, the Undersecretary of the Minister of the Interior Attilio Teruzzi, during Federzoni's brief absence from the Viminale, had second thoughts. Donati was thoroughly interrogated on the spot about the purpose of his voyage to Paris. In addition, he was meticulously searched and accompanied to the Hotel Fréjus guarded by the police as if he was under house arrest. Two days later, a police inspector showed up informing him that he had orders from Moncada to demand a declaration that he was leaving Italy spontaneously that is, free from any pressure or threats from the police, the fascist party or the Minister of the Interior. The police officer offered to allow him to take the first train to Paris within two hours provided that he conformed. Donati flatly refused. When Federzoni returned to his office, Teruzzi was overruled and Donati was allowed to continue with his trip out of Italian soil.

While Donati was being held at Bardonecchia, nobody was allowed to contact him. But (Blessed) Pier Giorgio Frassati dared to defy the fascist police and went to see his friend on his way out of the country.⁴¹ The friendship which tied them together was recent but firm. Donati would later



Pier Giorgio Frassati

write about him 'I could see my last friend in the motherland that I was leaving.'⁴²

In spite of the fact that general resentment of the Italian public at large during the Matteotti crisis was great, the opposition opting for the *Aventino* protest had not succeeded in weakening the fascist hold on the state. All the illusions of Mussolini's opponents faded when the expected intervention of the King failed to materialize. Finally, on 3 January 1925, in a speech at the Chamber of Deputies, Mussolini challenged everybody by declaring: 'I and I alone assume the political, moral and historical responsibility for all that happened. If fascism was a syndicate of organized crime, I am the chief of this organization.'⁴³ Nonetheless some of the well-



Luigi Einaudi



Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi

known Liberal opponents of the regime such as Giovanni Giolitti, Luigi Einaudi and especially Benedetto Croce believed at that time that Mussolini was not directly involved in the order to murder the Socialist opponent.⁴⁴ Still, Mussolini's now signalled the end of the remnants of parliamentary democracy that was swiftly followed by the absolute suppression of the freedom of the press.

Parallel to Mussolini's grip on power was his determination to wipe out all vigorous opposition against him. The *popolari* became the main target. The official Church hierarchy was moving forward on a path towards appeasement which, in the end, led to reconciliation between the Church and the State. The Catholic paper edited by Donati was simply moving on the opposite direction to the official position of the Church. Sturzo had been forced to resign on 10 July 1923. In the circumstances, *Il Popolo* had lost a very valid supporter of Catholic interest in political power in Italy. During the height of the Matteotti's crisis, Sturzo left Rome on 25 October 1924 on voluntary exile. Just as his exile was overshadowed with the Vatican's approval with the political power, so was his return vetoed by the Vatican and by Italy's post-war Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi himself. In Sturzo, Donati had lost a friend, a valid collaborator, a source of inspiration as well as a fiery and intransigent opponent of the fascist state. He would retain the link of friendship mostly through an array of correspondence.

Don Minzoni's murder followed by that of Matteotti hardened the fascist grip on power while Donati continued, to the very end of his stay in Italy, opposing the regime through *Il Popolo*. He had faced a Herculean task. When Donati left Italy, the days of *Il Popolo* were numbered until it could not survive the rampage on its press. Finally, on 9 November 1925, it had to close doors. It was only after the liberation of Rome by the Anglo-American forces in 1943 that the paper acquired life again with the first issue out on 23 October 1943 edited by Guido Gonella. Out of the Catholic minority which had chosen the road to exile, only Sturzo would eventually return home to take an active political role in post-war Italy. He resisted moves coming from the right wing of his party which had the tacit support of Pope Pius XII in 1952 towards the formation of an anti-communist block sustained also by MSI.⁴⁵

His colleague at the Partito Popolare and the first Prime Minister of republican Italy, Alcide de Gasperi, paid tribute to Donati in a speech on 14 January 1925:

Giuseppe Donati merits the attention of the Italian public. He was a journalist of spontaneous prose, bold investigator and fearless denouncer of scandals. He is one of those political types which one can define of excellence. He put Italy on the path of an extraordinary and inexhaustible Catherine wheel of indictments which concluded with the traditional explosion of the firecracker just like the summer village fireworks: when the High Court of Justice was called to judge De Bono for his complicity in the assassination of Matteotti.⁴⁶

In France

After abandoning Italy, Donati wandered for five years in France. Paris was the destination where the climate (not just the weather) was cooler in several respects.

Paris at that time was the home of the *lost generation*. Famous literary figures such as Ernest Hemingway, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Sherwood Anderson, D.H. Lawrence, John Dos Passos and the painter Waldo Peirce took refuge there. These were disillusioned with the useless human sacrifice of the First World War and opted to roam around Paris drinking absinthe and flocking to the legendary bookshop of Sylvia Beach, Shakespeare & Company. They lived a relatively extravagant life. Parallel to this clustering of literary figures, there was another set of roamers of another brand of *lost generation*.⁴⁷ While the former set was known with the gentle appellation of *expatriates*, the latter were exiles, forced or voluntary – *fuorusciti*. In contrast with the *expatriates*, the latter spent a miserable life

in wretched conditions, often depending on mutual solidarity. These people were in France because they could not exercise their values while living in a fascist state. They were considered as outlaws in their country of origin where law meant total submission to the oppressive state.

Paris was the centre stage for anti-fascist opposition, referred by Antonio Gramsci as the Barnum where all the bigger political parties orbited. They printed their own publications and mingled with the French political parties. Though the atmosphere was uneasy due to ideological divisions, they felt geographically closer to home. Giuseppe Donati, except for his very short interlude in Malta, lived here with his fraternal colleague Giuseppe Stragliati who owned a restaurant in Rue de Bondy. In all, over 300,000 exiles were scattered all over France with Giovanni Amendola, Pietro Nenni, Giuseppe Saragat, Luigi Longo, Carlo and Nello Rosselli, Sandro Pertini, Camillo Berneri, Francesco Saverio Nitti, Carlo Sforza, Filippo Turati, Claudio Treves, Bruno Buozzi, Guglielmo and Gina Ferraro, Riccardo Bauer, Ferruccio Parri, Piero Gobetti, Gaetano Salvemini, Aldo Garosci, and Silvio Trentin being the more famous. As time went by, the fascist regime succeeded in coercing consensus at home and the function of the opposition became limited to the commemoration of the death of their fellow freedom fighters such as Matteotti, Gobetti, Amendola and Turati.

After Donati's reluctant departure from his motherland, dispossessed of citizenship and deprived of the warmth of his family, he returned the silver and bronze medals bestowed to him for his gallantry during the First World War to King Vittorio Emmanuele III. He continued his struggle in France, sometimes misunderstood or even betrayed by his colleagues.



Pietro Nenni



Sandro Pertini



Giuseppe Saragat

Donati was perhaps one of the few of the early freedom fighters of the *resistenza* who struggled against the regime on Italian soil in the palaces representing power. Neither the *Aventino* opposition which was limited to merely boycotting an institution for which the regime had no respect, nor the sacrifice of Donati served to stop the fascist state from turning Italy into a more or less totalitarian state.

While in Italy, Donati was accustomed to keep informed his wife Vidya of all his movements and feelings. So supposedly it should not have been greatly different manoeuvring in Paris. The young *fuoruscito* could not reconcile himself with the separation from his beloved wife and children. He had insisted with the leaders of the PPI, with De Gasperi and Giuseppe Spataro (vice-secretary) for a possible return to Italy. Although he was strongly dissuaded from doing so, he went once clandestinely in September 1925 staying at the house of a family friend, the lawyer Giuseppe Cisco, *zio Beppe* in Venice. This was a moment of great joy and at the same time of great trepidation for the family. Realizing the danger he exposed to himself, to his friend and to his family, he left Venice on the night of 30 October 1925. He left as secretly as he came, bidding farewell and embracing his family for the last time ever. He was destined never to see Italy again nor his beloved family.⁴⁸

The tie between Gaetano Salvemini would outlive Donati. Just a few years before his death, Salvemini delineated on *Il Mondo* of 3 May 1952 Donati's anti-fascism making use of the adjective *donatiano*. Salvemini underlined Donati's act of personal courage and reckless courage during the Matteotti entanglement when, in contrast, the Opposition deputies took safe refuge at the *Aventino*. Donati, in fact, had faced a one man battle against Mussolini.⁴⁹



King Vittorio Emmanuele III

Notes

- 1 Prezzolini was the last person of this illustrious compilation of thinkers to die. He passed away in 1982 at the age of 100 years.
- 2 Giovanni Battista Migliori, *L'antifascismo di Giuseppe Donati in Trentanni di Storia Italiana (1915-1945)*, Franco Antonicelli, (Ed.) Einaudi, Torino, 1975, 140.
- 3 Nicola Angiulli, and Giacomo De Antonellis, *Giuseppe Donati, Cattolico antifascista*, second edition, Cooperativa Editrice Donati, Milano, 1972, 39.
- 4 *St. Edward's College Magazine*, Vol. I, no 6, 1931, 10. Acknowledgment: Patricia Salomone, who kindly made available her father's collection of *St. Edward's College Magazine*.
- 5 Severa, who became a Salesian nun called Suor Severa delle Figli di Maria Ausiliatrice, died on 1 April 2013.
- 6 Giuseppe Barillá, 'Amano insieme l'Italia e il denaro degli inglesi.' *Il giornale d'Italia*, 19 September 1950.
- 7 Marcucci, 384.
- 8 Angiulli and De Antonellis, 39.
- 9 Giovanni Giglio, *The Triumph of Barabbas*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1937, 13.
- 10 E.W. Polson Newman, *The Mediterranean and its problems*, A.M. Philpot, London, 1927, 16.
- 11 Angelo Majo, *La stampa cattolica in Italia, Storia e documentazione*, Piemme, Milano, 1992, 166.
- 12 Eugenio Guccione, *Cattolici e democrazia: Ventura, Murri, Sturzo e le critiche di Gobetti*, Italo Latina Americano, Palermo, 1980, 60.
- 13 Giuseppe Rossini, *Il delitto Matteotti tra il Viminale e l'Aventino*, Società Editrice il Mulino, Bologna, 1966, 22.
- 14 Angiulli and De Antonellis, 57.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Carlo Dané and Giuseppe Sangiorgi, *Il Romanzo del Popolo*, Gangemi Editore, Roma, 2003, 81.
- 17 Alberto Comuzzi, *Don Minzoni, il Matteotti cattolico*, Edizioni Messaggero, Padova, 1985, 116.
- 18 For a profile on Giovanni Giglio see Giorgio Peresso, 'The Maltese Socialist expelled by Mussolini', *The Sunday Times of Malta*, 31 October 2010.
- 19 'Telling the Truth,' *Time Magazine*, 4 April 1924.
- 20 Alexander De Grand, *Italian Fascism, its origin and development*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, second edition 1990, 52.
- 21 Giglio, 123.
- 22 Giglio, *ibid.*
- 23 Nicholas Farrel, *Mussolini, A new life*, Phoenix, London, 2003, 145.
- 24 Geatano Arfé, *Storia del socialismo italiano (1892-1926)*, Einaudi, Torino, 1965, 363.
- 25 'The Matteotti Tragedy', *The Daily Malta Chronicle*, 18 August 1924.
- 26 *The Literary Digest*, Vol. LXXXIX, No. 3 New York, 17, April, 1926 Whole Number 1878, 113.
- 27 Farrell, 151.
- 28 *Il Popolo*, 13 June 1924
- 29 Brunello Vigezzi, 1919-1925 *Dopoguerra e Fascismo, Politica in Italia*, Edizioni Laterza, Bari. 1965, 245.
- 30 General Emilio De Bono. See: *Selected Biographical Notes*.
- 31 Alexander J. De Grand, *The Italian Nationalist Association and the Rise of Fascism in Italy*, University of Nebraska Press, London, 1978, 169.
- 32 Mauro Canali, *Il delitto Matteotti*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2004, 241.

- 33 Giovanni Sale, *La Chiesa di Mussolini, I rapporti tra fascismo e religione*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2011, 146.
- 34 *Il sottoscritto Giuseppe Donati all'alta corte di Giustizia*, directed by Leandro Castellani, RAI released on 25 November 1983. Acknowledgment: Francesca Maria Cadin. Rai Teche, Roma.
- 35 Herman Finer, *Mussolini's Italy*, Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1935, 325.
- 36 Antonio Anile, See: *Selected Biographical Notes*.
- 37 Carlo Santulli, *Filofascisti e Partito Popolare (1923-1926)* unpublished dissertation, Università di Roma, La Sapienza, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, 2001, 152.
- 38 The New York Times, 14 June 1925
- 39 Giuseppe Spataro in *Cinquantant'anni di storia Italiana*, Atti di convegno di Vasto dell'8 dicembre 1989 nell' decennale della morte, LIV, supplemento al numero 11-1990 della rivista 'Oggi e Domani.'
- 40 Gabriella Fanello Marcucci, *Sorevegliato speciale – Sturzo a Londra nel mirino dell'OVRA*, Rubbettino Editore, Soveria Manelli, Catanzaro, 2006, 12.
- 41 Pier Giorgio Frassati. See: *Selected Biographical Notes*.
- 42 Carla Caselegno, Pier Giorgio Frassati, Edizioni Effatá, Cantalupa, Torino, 2005, 167.
- 43 *Atti del Parlamento Italiano*, Camera dei deputati, sezione 1924-1925, Vol. III, Discussioni, Roma, Tipografia della Camera dei Deputati, 1925, 2030. Acknowledgment: Dott.ssa Martina Mazzariol, Ufficio Relazioni con il pubblico, Biblioteca Camera dei Deputati, Roma.
- 44 Mario José Cereghino and Giovanni Fasanella, *Il Golpe Inglese*, Chiarelettere Editore, Milano, 2011, 13. Mauro Canali *op. cit.* and *Le guerre del petrolio* (2004) unearthed archival material retrieved from American and British sources in support of this theory.
- 45 Giovanni Galli, *Storia della Democrazia Cristiana*, Laterza, Bari, 1978, 17.
- 46 Alcide De Gasperi, *Le Battaglie del Partito Popolare* a cura di Paolo Piccoli e Armando Vadagnini, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1992, 503.
- 47 *Lost generation*, see *Selected Glossary*.
- 48 Dané and Sangiorgi, 81.
- 49 Francesco Luigi Ferrari, *Lettere e documenti inediti*, Volume 1, Giuseppe Rossini (Ed.) Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1986, 188.

CHAPTER 2

Interlude in Malta

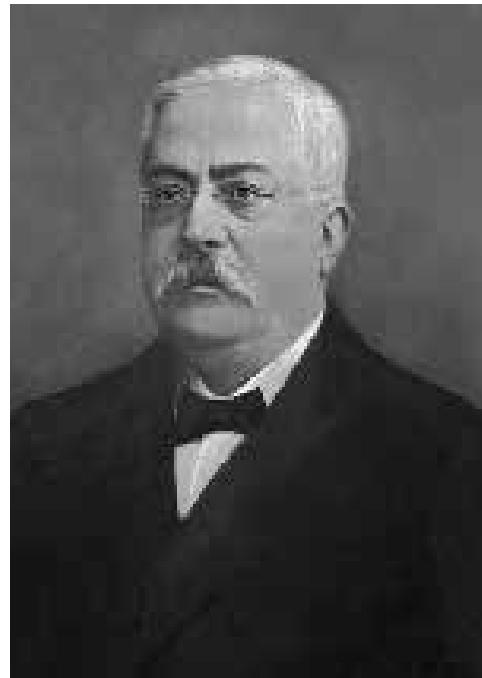
The policy of the governors of St Edward college in Malta entailed that the students were not to be exposed to the influence of Maltese teachers who were not just filo-fascist but openly fascist. But the governors had another hurdle to overcome: sourcing an openly active anti-fascist still teaching in Italy was difficult because such a person would still need official permission to travel out of Italy to teach. So Lord Strickland scouted for the right candidate through his connections in London, when choosing the first Rector of the College, Father (later Monsignor) Dr. Frederick Kerr McClement, he came across a Catholic professor lecturing in London at Birkbeck College of the University of London, Angelo Crespi.¹ Crespi's recommendations were to carry a lot of weight on the choice of Giuseppe Donati and his successor, Umberto Calosso.

Founding St. Edward College

From their earliest days, the sons of the anglophile elite in Malta were brought up according to British conventions. It was mandatory for them to be able to speak English fluently, that language being the *lingua franca* of the world at the peak of the existence of the British Empire. The anglophiles view was that British education in Malta was at a disadvantage after the closure of the Jesuit College in St. Julians. Private schools in Malta were mostly run by the clergy, some of which were managed by Sicilian Jesuits who had been expelled from Italy after its unification. Although these clerics failed to transmit their prejudice against the values of *Risorgimento*, they still influenced their pupils with the dissemination of *italianità* as a political



Arturo Mercieca



Fortunato Mizzi

objective alternating with irredentism. Two beneficiaries of this education were the Gozitans, Antonio Cini² and Arturo Mercieca. Cini, who was a close collaborator of Fortunato Mizzi, had argued fervently about the position of Italian as an official language. Mercieca, who was to become the faithful follower of Fortunato's son, Enrico, was the founder in 1901 of *La Giovine Malta*. The choice of the name was enough to reveal the agenda, sharing the same stem as Mazzini's revolutionary movement, *La Giovine Italia* that spread throughout Italy during the struggle for independence.

The Italian school *Umberto Primo* was the first secular school to be launched in Malta. It was opened in 1913 by Luigi Carlo Borg and was located in Old Bakery Street at a palace named *Palazzo Carafa*.³ This imposing palace was built by the future Grand Master Gregorio Carafa – when he was Admiral of the Fleet of the Order of St. John – to serve as his residence.

The propaganda objective of the institution was seen by the British authorities as a veiled attempt 'to give the Maltese some sort of systematic education which they could not get in their own schools.'⁴ With the advent of Mussolini's seizure of power, education turned out to be one of the tools of fascist propaganda. This was not just directed at the small colony of Italians living in Malta but was also aimed at Maltese children. Directors

and teachers of Italian schools abroad were employed directly by the Italian foreign ministry.⁵ The object of propaganda was to influence foreign public opinion, making it favourable to fascism by using different resources aimed at portraying its superiority.⁶

The Anglophile lobby in Malta longed to re-establish an English boarding school in Malta. It was considered as 'vital for Maltese to have a British education: a perfect knowledge of English was not obtained from foreigners, and those five codes of manliness which have made the British what they are must be imported by Britishers.'⁷ At the peak of the language controversy during the term of the Constitutionalist government, Prime Minister Gerald Strickland approached the English Jesuit seminary at Manresa House in Roe Hampton asking for the return of the English Jesuits to Malta. Fr. Vincent Hornyold who used to teach at the earlier Jesuit College⁸ responded by reminding the Prime Minister that, way back in 1924, Fr. Wright had tendered a report to the Colonial Office, who point blank refused to finance the project.⁹ Strickland was not easily discouraged by the candid reaction of Fr. Hornyold and sought the support of Monsignor Keatings, Bishop of Mettallonolis. The



Sir Augustus Bartolo and Lord Gerald Strickland.



Lady Margaret Hulton Strickland and her step daughter Mabel at Villa Bologna.

Old Ignatian Minister of Education, Sir Augustus Bartolo (professor of Law) presented to Strickland a memorandum about the re-establishment of an English College in Malta.¹⁰ Lieutenant-Governor Sir Thomas A.V. Best, in a letter to Sir Odo Russell, the British minister at the Vatican, observed that the departure of the English Jesuits in 1904 was a serious blow for the higher education of young men and the training of future leaders for the public life of these islands.¹¹

Since the possibility of financing the new college by imperial sources could not be relied on, Lady Margaret Hulton Strickland stepped in by providing a generous financial settlement towards the foundation of St. Edward's College. The Governor of Malta, General Sir Philip Du Cane, persuaded the British War Office to grant the Cottonera Military Hospital to this new educational institution as it was considered to be a suitable site for the new college.¹² One of the trustees on the new college was the Cardinal Primate of the United Kingdom, Francis Bourne. Yet, when the college was inaugurated on 1 October 1929, the Maltese Archbishop Dom Mauro Caruana was not present to bless it as would have been appropriate. Cardinal Bourne chose a cleric to be the college's first Rector, the already-mentioned Father Frederick Kerr McClement.

Donati chosen to teach Italian

Over the years, Giuseppe Donati had reluctantly lost all hope of ever rejoining his family in Italy. Since he continued writing against the fascist state from Paris, the possibility of his return was certainly out of the question. Even in Paris, his movements were under the surveillance of the secret police that were very active in French territory. There was no chance of improving his condition since he was sharing with several companions in exile, not just his ideals, but also his misery. His state of health made his



Archbishop Dom Mauro Caruana

life even gloomier. Giuseppe Stragliati, writing to Sturzo on 10 January 1928 on a letterhead of the *Comité de secours aux réfugiés Italiens*, summed up the state of health of Giuseppe Donati as being not good at all. Stragliati noted that for three or four weeks Donati had curled himself up and turned out to be quite forgetful. He had locked himself in his room in darkness without eating anything. On one particular evening, he felt sick while at table and those present felt really scared at the sight. The main trouble was that he hardly slept and depended on medicine to have some sort of relief. Stragliati concluded that, if the weather remained cold, it was doubtful whether Donati would be able to do any work at all.¹³ His mentor Luigi Sturzo, from his exile in London, did his very best to come to his assistance. A golden opportunity appeared on the scene with the vacancy for a teacher of Italian, a post created by the opening of St. Edward College in Malta.

The widespread interest of Italian culture in Malta was perceived as a challenge to the British way of life. Gerald Strickland had hoped to remedy the cultural deficit by establishing St. Edward College which offered an elitist style of education based on British ethics. Apart from the fact that the then existent *pari passu* had imposed the tuition of English and Italian contemporaneously, Strickland himself did not want to exclude instruction in Italian to counter his adversaries' claims that he hated anything Italian. The appointment of the editor of *il Popolo* with St. Edward's gave way to speculations by the fascist oligarchy about a plot against Italian interests in Malta.

After the isolation of Donati's wandering in Paris for five years, he was finally relieved with a trip to London in September 1930 where he met his confidant Sturzo who convened Carlo Sforza to discuss Donati's plight. Together, they sought to find a stable position for the person who had sacrificed everything for the ideals they all shared.

Sforza was a past and future Minister of Foreign Affairs (in the Giolitti cabinet of 1920-21 and under De Gasperi in 1947-50) who, like Sturzo, had chosen voluntary exile in London. He was the point of reference for the major *fuorusciti* such as the socialist leader Giuseppe Emanuele Modigliani, the wandering Jew of anti-fascism Gaetano Salvemini, the leader of *Giustizia e Libertà* movement Carlo Rosselli, the Catholic historian Guglielmo Ferraro and the founder of the Partito Popolare himself, Luigi Sturzo.¹⁴ During the time Donati was in London, the Rector of St. Edward's also happened to be in London scouting for a suitable master of Italian. Fr. McClement knew quite well Angelo Crespi, a fellow anti-fascist who patronised the company of Sforza who introduced him to Donati. St. Edward College required a



Lord Gerald Strickland, Prime Minister (1927-1930).

master of Italian whose native language was Italian. At first, it proved to be difficult to choose a teacher from Italy because the 'Italian government had refused to allow an Italian professor to come to teach at St. Edward College.'¹⁵ In addition, there was an unwritten proviso: the candidate had to be an anti-fascist. There were persons in Malta whose academic profile was superior to that of Donati but no other candidate was as anti-fascist as him. The Donati candidacy provided Strickland with a person having the right academic qualifications as well as clear-cut anti-fascist credentials. McClement reminded Donati that Crespi must have explained to him the prevailing political situation in Malta. It was indispensable that the master of Italian should not have anything to do whatsoever with Italian or Maltese politics. It was stressed that tact was absolutely necessary and, above all, he had to be a fervent Catholic.¹⁶ Crespi used to address affectionately McClement by the nickname *Loi* in his correspondence. Still Donati was aware about the language controversy as, while at Paris, he had read Italian papers that gave prominence to the political situation in Malta so he knew all about the delicate political situation in the island. Donati assured McClement of his commitment to be extraneous to local politics to which he was totally indifferent.¹⁷

It was doubtful whether a typical Italian professor would go for the Malta vacancy with the knowledge of the prospect of facing the hostility of the Italian colony and its Maltese cronies.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Donati took the plunge and accepted the risks. According to Mussolini's secretary, Alessandro Chiavolini, the impression among the hardworking Italian colony in Malta was of that of 'disgust and disapproval'. It was wrongly speculated that, with a person like Donati present in the island, the controversy against fascism and Italy was bound to increase.¹⁹

Crespi was not new in the Maltese scene. He contributed in the Maltese press by contesting Enrico Mizzi's platform over the language question. In one of his contributions in the *Daily Malta Chronicle* on 17 May 1930 Crespi wrote:

Mazzini, most Italian amongst Italians never thought of raising any 'Malta question'... We are fully aware that neither on geological nor on historical, nor on philological grounds Malta may seriously by well informed students be claimed for Italy.²⁰

Crespi predicted doom for Malta if it opted to change flags from British to Italian. This position was in direct contrast to what Donati would put in print a year later. As far as Strickland was concerned, he could not find a better

ally than Angelo Crespi with such imperialist credentials in his pedigree. But Crespi had come to the rescue of Donati and saved him from a critical financial state.

Preparing to move to Malta

Following the meeting with Crespi and McClement in London, Donati was ready to move to Malta. McClement was to meet Donati in Paris to communicate to him the final details of St Edward College's working conditions. The Rector offered some cash in advance to cover expenses for travelling to Malta where he was expected by 29 September 1930.

While still at Paris, Donati explained in detail his state of mind in a letter he sent to Don Sturzo on 15 September 1930, after having half-heartedly left the abode of his friend Giuseppe Stragliati where he had been cared for and loved more than a son. But Donati needed cash badly. He wanted to live.²¹ This particular letter was the beginning of his final batch of a series of letters – his *epistolario*, which he would write to the PPI's founder. Donati cultivated an anthology of correspondence with his friends, especially with Luigi Sturzo, throughout his stay in Malta up to his eventual return to Paris where he died. Donati was soon to discover that what McClement was offering by way of salary was different from what he had understood from Professor Crespi. However, the Rector assured him that what he was offering was identical to all the foreign teachers at St. Edward's. Donati felt he had no reason to complain and he deemed it was generous enough because, amongst other benefits, he was entitled to free lodging, food, laundry and, in case of need, even medical assistance. Just as a formality, the offer was still subject to the approval of the Board of Governors of the College.

In any event, Donati was somewhat distressed that he was leaving the Latin style habitat which included the hospitality presented by his friend Giuseppe Stragliati. But his top priority was surviving: morally, financially and physically. In Paris, he did merely exist, not really living and the cold climate of France was irritating him enormously. McClement, however, assured him that in Malta he would complain for opposite reasons. In fact, he was prophetic because Donati would later find fault with the hot climate of Malta. He was on his way to land in a country a *metizio*, a term he would later use, of an Anglo-Saxon/Italo-Saracen breed. He was determined to sacrifice himself because his family was at stake. He was also prepared to do a good job. Above all, his family was always on his mind.

Donati told Sturzo that he would write to Angelo Crespi to thank him

for sponsoring him for the St. Edward's assignment. He was so grateful to Sturzo that he felt that it was more than just a recommendation - it was an act of charity. Having said all this to his mentor, Donati proceeded with a list of needs required to make a respectable appearance in Malta. He lacked not only money but basic clothing such as a pair of shoes and a coat. He was very enthusiastic to start his teaching career in Malta. The Rector was frank with Donati who was not discouraged with the fact that he had to start instructing the Italian language from scratch. He told him that none of the students of St. Edward's had, so far, succeeded in passing the matriculation examination of the University of Malta. This impression gained by Donati seemed to contrast with what the Rector actually reported in the first annual progress report of the College. Donati prepared the books, the programmes and the methods of teaching. He firmly believed that, just as he had been successful in Paris with private tutoring, he would be equally successful in Malta.

While Donati was preparing his departure for Malta, the students of St. Edward College were aware that 'negotiations have long been pending for the appointment of a master of Italian nationality to teach his native language at St. Edward's. The Board of Governors believed that the College would be 'richer [in the Department of Italian] after the summer holidays with the arrival of a distinguished professor,' namely Giuseppe Donati.²² Until his arrival, the administration of the St. Edward's College had engaged a teacher of Italian in the person of Fr Carmelo Calascione, the rector of the Church of St. Philip at Senglea. McClement was very enthusiastic about the choice of the Italian professor, having travelled himself to London to select the most capable person to teach the language of Dante. The academic credentials were considered superb. Donati had read Law and Political Economy at the University of Florence, where he taught for two years in the Collegio Fiorentino. It was natural for the Rector of the College to laud the patriotic valour of the new Italian master, since both had served their respective countries in the war effort. Donati had risen to the rank of Captain. He had graduated as a lawyer but did not practice law. He had been decorated for his gallantry in action during the First World War and had been wounded several times. He had suffered a lesion around his lungs from a bullet wound which he carried right up to his death. On one occasion, he had actually been captured by the Austrians and given up for dead. During the subsequent period of recovery, he was involved in the education of officer cadets. After the war, he taught at the Ateneo Veneto. When he left the teaching career, he became very active in journalism and politics. Therefore, the College was fortunate to have a scholar of this calibre in its midst. McClement acknowledged the importance of the

instruction of Italian language 'as a clear necessity for future University and social life in Malta.'²³ His optimism proved accurate as 'great advance in this subject had been noted, even in boys who were ignorant of this language on entry. The arrival of a professor of Italian nationality was a great assistance.'²⁴

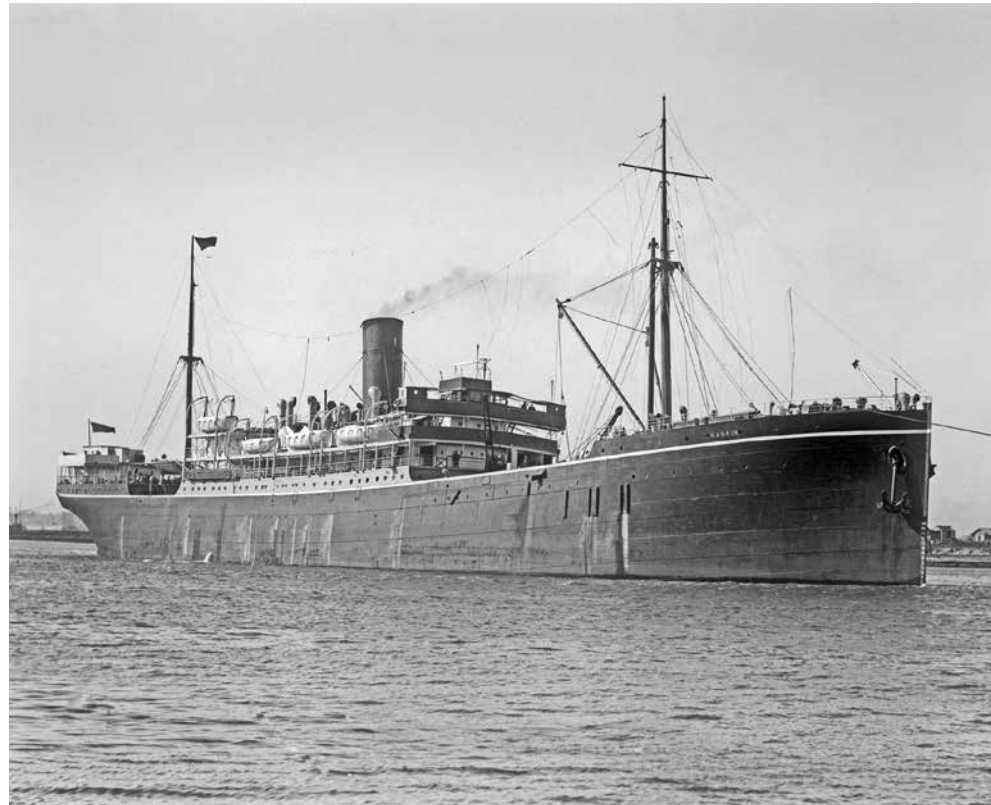
Donati became very relaxed mentally once his path was approaching a sure destination. Sturzo also advanced Donati with some money, a gesture which was greatly appreciated. But there was one pending hurdle to be overcome. He had to travel by sea to Malta without touching Italian territory for obvious reasons. He was certain that the moment he landed in Italy, he would be arrested on the spot. He was not enthusiastic with the option of waiting in Marseilles for a British vessel such as the P&O which would stop in Malta en route to India. However, the most practical way to go about it was to go to Tunis and take a boat from there to Malta. The first option was out of question as he would arrive in Malta some four days later than scheduled. This odd way of travelling to Malta made him appear like a crank with the Thomas Cook travel agency manager at Marseilles who advised his client that it made no sense to take a longer route than geography dictated. This inconvenience irritated Donati but, in a way, it was a positive stress because he was overcoming a challenge that had crossed his path. He was optimistic that he would also overcome this hurdle and was happy to undertake such a bold step.

Arrival in Malta

As soon as he embarked on the vessel *Nankin*, Donati put together pen and paper to thank Don Luigi. There was nothing much to do on the ship except reading and eating. In spite of the bad weather that was encountered, he was not particularly disturbed and he anticipated that he would gain weight by the time he arrived in Malta.

Actually, he missed the scheduled target because he arrived at Malta on Sunday 5 October 1930. McClement was waiting for him by the quay at Valletta. He had hardly arrived at the College, where he found a letter of welcome from Sturzo. He took his first visual stock of the surroundings. For him, the vision of the towns appeared to be one single city. He considered it a pretty sight of mixed oriental and Italian characteristics. The College was and is still a marvel to this very date. At first, he felt like a fish out of water but was sure that he would adjust himself to his new surroundings.

Upon his arrival in Malta, Donati first stayed at a shabby hotel, the Hotel de France,²⁵ in an equally shabby street, the notorious *Strada Stretta* or the



Giuseppe Donati made the trip to Malta on s.s. Nankin.

'gut' as it was known by British servicemen. The news of his arrival in Malta reached both the Italian Consulate as well as the few anti-fascists living on the island.

Professor Arnaldo Fabriani, who was a master of Italian at the Seminary, and later at the Lyceum, accompanied by Professor Giuseppe Manfredi, who taught Italian at Flores College, were the first to pay him a visit at the hotel. Manfredi recorded his impression of this encounter:

I remember him tall, a bit curved resting on a walking stick, shabbily dressed but his face looking upwards with his vivid and penetrating eyes. It seemed that the events in which he went through weighed heavily on his shoulders but his marked spirit looked at heaven. Above all his eyes demonstrated his command on events and on men.²⁶

Crespi did not desert his friend while at Malta. A few weeks after Donati's arrival, Crespi wrote to him to ascertain that he was well taken care of. He advised him that he would soon be meeting Sir Augustus to pass on the

message on the presence of the highest cultured person in Malta.²⁷ He was quick to inform him about the meeting.²⁸

Donati's enthusiasm with the newly-found oasis was somewhat marred by his state of mind. Most of the letters he wrote from Malta reflected the appalling state of mind that an émigré unquestionably goes through. He went through his personal dramas such as the absence of his family and especially the loss of his only son in almost desperate terms. His precarious state of health precipitated such a tone. In these letters, the political problems he debated so arduously in Paris went into the background. He appeared to have been seeking a solitary therapeutic comfort by recounting and sharing with his acquaintances the *calvario* of his recurrent fastidious moods. Donati was very close to Mario Bergamo among the array of fellow émigrés in Paris²⁹ and one candid letter he wrote to him is such a testimony: Donati felt that there was not much to do in Malta for the anti-fascist cause. What was absolutely vital in the Maltese environment was to be an exemplary practising Catholic. He considered it fortunate that the local fascists waged war against the College for the same reasons Mussolini did. He implored Bergamo to visualize the kind of difficult secluded life he was enduring. He considered himself to be exiled in exile - *l'esilio nell'esilio*.³⁰ On the other hand, Bergamo felt that his friend was much better placed in Malta - *te beato*, he wrote. He asked him half-jokingly whether there was a vacancy for a janitor in the College.³¹

Donati's coming to Malta benefited him immensely. He had just spent five years roaming around France indulging in an activity which did not produce any monetary benefit. While the separation from his family disturbed him in Malta as much as it did in Paris, he was now looking forward for a remunerative assignment. He surpassed without delay the initial surprise of a different atmosphere, not just the weather (which troubled him as much as that of Paris) but, more so, the cultural ambiance existing in Malta. Still, health-wise, he felt better. He revealed to Sturzo, who more than a confidant appeared to have the role of 'postal' confessor, that he suddenly felt *più calmo di corpo e di spirito*.³² Yet Sturzo, in a letter dated 14 October 1930 to his other disciple Francesco Luigi Ferrari, wrote that while Donati's trip had been quite pleasant, he felt lost when he arrived at St. Edward's.³³ Donati progressively felt at ease with his superiors, with his colleagues and with his pupils. Initially, he thought he would be unable to cope with the job since he had been absent for quite a number of years from a full-time teaching career. He soon regained self-confidence in what he was doing while, at the same time, he admitted that pessimism was his main fault.

Donati described his place of work as a lake of serenity. He was greatly

impressed with the beauty and the size of the College's gardens as well as its spacious living quarters. Later, he resided at the College which was a breathtaking change compared to the ugly street in the city. He was quite satisfied with the spacious room McClement selected for him. He could look at the sea and imagine the sight of his mentor's birthplace. Actually, Sturzo himself told him that there was a point in Malta where he could catch a glimpse of Sicily and from where he could spot Mount Caltagirone.³⁴

He was above all pleased with the generosity of the Rector, the cordiality shown by his colleagues and the alertness and the liveliness of his students. Still he considered that the timetable was appalling - 34 hours of teaching with hardly any free time left. He thought that the food at the College was quite good and abundant. He saw no need to wander around Malta, avoiding as much as possible the several local poignant characters around. As in the litany of saints pertaining to the deliverance from evil, he hailed *Libera nos Domine* from these gossipers in the same way believers evoke the terror of the last judgment. He wanted to abstain from any contact whatsoever outside his academic parameters. At first, his only contact with what was happening in Italy and the world was glimpsing through *Corriere della sera*.

Getting familiar with Malta

Donati was not very happy with the books he found at the College. He was interested in introducing the books written by Sturzo's brother, Monsignor Mario Sturzo.³⁵ There was a good degree of mutual respect with the Rector of the College, who adopted many of the recommendations suggested by Donati. In order not to give the impression that he wanted to change abruptly the curriculum, he was ready to work with the books already used by the College. However, he had faith in Father McClement's disposition to accept changes in the future. Donati was very pleased when he succeeded to obtain copies of the books Bishop Sturzo had published. This was a guide for writing superior prose aimed at educating through discipline the attitude of students. It identified rules and sources of composition, the writing of narrative and poetry. The book dealt with the versification, prosody as well as the rhyming of poetry. Some of the ideas expressed are still relevant to-day. He was hoping that he would introduce this book into the college's curriculum. But this did not materialise because Donati's presence at St. Edward's hardly lasted two terms. These copies of the book, however, survive to this very date and are preserved at the National Library in Valletta. He was less confident that Mario Sturzo's work on philosophy would be accepted in Malta. He considered

them of high intellectual calibre. Although he conceived the idea of making them known to the local literary scene, it was not easy to disseminate such thoughts in the conservative climate of Malta. He confided with Sturzo his views about the teaching of philosophy at the University in the following terms:

The climate in philosophical circles is also dominated by clerics who are very suspicious and jealous of their monopoly. Here the teaching of philosophy that is taught at the University is done exclusively through priests and monks. Having witnessed certain authorized exploits, they are extremely backwards.³⁶

This impression was not very different to that identified with that of his employer Strickland or that of his successor, Umberto Calosso. Having made these observations, he was in the beginning very determined to distance himself from the Italianite elite in Malta. Initially he was determined to stay aloof from the company of Maltese.³⁷ He was kept abreast of what was happening inside the anti-fascist struggle outside Italy through correspondence with friends. This is as far as he would go. He kept closely in touch with his wife. In turn, she wrote letters giving the progress of the children at school. Occasionally, she went into great length to inform him of some ailment they were passing through. She also informed him that she was constantly watched and followed by OVRA's agents and that the surveillance had increased.³⁸ At times, he did not feel completely at ease at the College with the English colleagues. He believed that there was room for improvement with the standard of education exercised at the College. At times, he was not very enthusiastic about the imperturbable British character. He considered them ridiculously meticulous as well as very hard to please.

He was quite pleased with the composition of the College pupil population which consisted of fifty students. He prepared a very detailed report to the Rector on 12 March 1930 about the progress of each student since he arrived. He was instructed to give tuition to 38 pupils, aged from 8 to 17 years. They were very lively as is the case with Southern European boys. All the pupils came from the island's prominent families and, consequently, they were well educated. Still he was initially stunned with the change to an ordained Anglo-Saxon routine. He saw the change as rather brusque and deep compared to the almost vagabond life of Paris. Actually, he realized that the change was more perceived than real. He had all the good intentions and the will to overcome the first hurdles.

Within a month of his stay in Malta, he started to have qualms about the surroundings in the island. He experienced the first south-westerly wind,

libeccio. He imagined that it was so hard that it seemed that it was going to blow the island away. He consulted the College's doctor about the wind who told him that there was nothing to worry about. He consoled himself that, if he was in Sicily, he would have experienced the same *scirocco*. He considered the pupils as rather undisciplined since it was not easy to give a lesson without interruptions. It looked that this was a sort of a pattern in the Maltese educational system at the time. Eric Shepherd, professor of English at the University of Malta close to the period Donati taught in Malta, left an equally unflattering testimony of the manners of students.³⁹

Donati was lost because he had nobody in Malta able to guide his conscience. He expressed: *Quis custodiet [ipsos] custodes?* - "Who will guard the guards?" From his first weeks in Malta, he started to visualize himself in Dante Alighieri's part of the *Divina Comedia* expressing that he did not know what happens in Malebolge, the eighth circle of Hell, the "evil ditches." Just three days after expressing *Libera nos Domine* from chatterboxes, both Maltese and Italians, once more he pronounced categorically to Sturzo that he had no contacts, Maltese or otherwise - *coi maltesi non parlo, altri non vedo*. He was habitually aware of wild speculations regarding amnesties to *fuorusciti* like him. These did not materialize. What bugged him most was an allegation that his stay in Malta was negotiated by none other than Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli⁴⁰ with Don Luigi Sturzo so that he could enjoy a place in the sun because of his health. To add insult to injury, it was claimed that he attended only two lessons a week, just enough to have some distraction. The polemics with the *Concentrazione* he left in Paris continued going on. It was also insinuated that he was an agent of the Jesuit Order. In reality, he detested the Jesuits like his successor Calosso, but for different reasons.

L'esilio dentro l'esilio

Over the years, a number of visitors who landed in Malta somehow involuntarily found it



Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, later Pope Pius XII.

rather unpleasant and not up their expectations. One category was those who were considered as undesirables in their home country such as émigrés, or those that were posted to the island because of their employment. A most celebrated visitor in the middle of the nineteenth century was the Italian exile who would later become Prime Minister, Francesco Crispi – the one who coined for Malta the term *scoglio ingrato*, the ungrateful island.⁴¹ The well-known actor David Niven, who was stationed in Malta at the time of Donati's interlude, described the island as that 'sod of a place.'⁴² Unlike some British visitors who tended to look down on Malta, Donati was positive in his remarks. Visitors who came from colder countries tended to exaggerate about the climate especially the *scirocco*, which was not much different from some parts of Italy. Luigi Barzini Jr. (a member of a dynasty of journalists) maintained that 'the climate of Northern Italy is about the same as that of most continental European countries. Milan and Turin are colder in winter than Copenhagen, warmer in summer than Valletta or Algiers. Central and Southern Italy have about the same climate as other Mediterranean countries.'⁴³ Donati too acknowledged in a letter to his friend Francesco Luigi Ferrari the tendency of exiles to exaggerate.⁴⁴ Ferrari was a prominent figure of the PPI's left wing faction who, after being physically assaulted by fascist squads, decided to settle in Belgium to continue the struggle for freedom and democracy.⁴⁵ The type of weather in the Mediterranean was what it was: Malta had no monopoly on the *scirocco*. It was *scirocco* for most countries in the Mediterranean basin. It is *khamisin* for countries in the Middle East. Donati had an obsession with the hot, dry sand-laden wind that blows from the deserts of North Africa across the Mediterranean and it seemed to have affected his moods very much. He could identify *scirocco*, *grecale* or *libeccio*. It became a mania. It looked as though nothing seemed to move or happen in Malta. So *scirocco* was at least a topic of a typical conversation.

He kept in touch with his family and friends through letters he wrote to his wife Vidya, to his two children Severa and Grazia and to his counsellor Don Luigi. Sturzo was his inspiration and the person he relied for encouragement. He also corresponded with friends such as Mario Bergamo and Francesco Luigi Ferrari together with his guide Geatano Salvemini in Paris. At times, his feelings expressed in these letters were rather depressing, a rather sad reflection of his fragile physical state. In fact, he had been extremely sick before he came to Malta. In his letters, he referred to his infant son Guido, who lived for just seven years, who he called affectionately *Dodino*. Guido was always in his thoughts, imploring him for inspiration as if he were his living guardian angel. What was striking in his letters was his great grief for

the distance that separated him from his dear ones. He felt distressed that he could offer them only meagre financial support. He was very upset about the fascist regime's refusal to grant a passport to his wife when he was at Paris. He felt saddened by the fact that he never saw the face of his daughter Grazia which he called Fiamma as she was born after his departure from Italy. He was bothered about the fact that that he could not dedicate his personal attention to the education of his children. His letters to Vidya showed his paramount devotion to his wife though he seemed satisfied with the financial compensation he was receiving for his sacrifice. In fact, he wrote to his sister Carolina in Faenza: 'they pay me in gold but I am not happy because I miss my dear ones.'⁴⁶

Though he was a devout Christian, he believed that the Church in Italy was too fascist for his tastes; yet he did not openly challenge its opportunistic position. However, he found the Church in Malta even more difficult to digest. His intellectual pursuits included a dialogue not only with people of different ideologies but also with those who had a social soul inside the Catholic circles in which he orbited. In fact, he was very pleased with the books Don Luigi sent him. He considered them to be of a high intellectual calibre, not easy to disseminate in the conservative climate then existent at Malta. In his initial approaches towards the Italophiles he came across, he concluded that he had to be extremely cautious. Donati was writing in an environment resulting at that time in Malta subsequent to the local Bishops' pastoral letter that had imposed mortal sin on the voters for Strickland candidates, as well as to the readers of the *Ix-Xemx* and the *Daily Malta Chronicle*. The array of preachers that followed that event was to fill the Maltese politico-religious *corrida* for many months.

Joining the Nationalist bandwagon

Donati was faced with a cultural shock when he came to Malta. While in exile at Paris, just by reading Italian papers, he could certainly sense the extent of the tense political situation in Malta. Still he had no idea as to the degree of hostility existing between Strickland and the Church, the Nationalist Party, the Vatican and Italy. The Nationalists' defence of *italianità* was rightly or wrongly equated with adulation of fascism. So Donati found himself in the crossfire of siding with those who were considered to be Mussolini's proxies in Malta and against the person ultimately responsible for paying his salary

The future Maltese Prime Minister Dom Mintoff would later sketch the

link to Italy by summing it up through the existence 'on the southern part of the Island [there] run cart-trucks leading to high cliffs overhanging the deep blue sea. Eaten away by heavy wheels thousands of years ago, the ruts in the soft rock remind the Maltese that once their land was joined to a large continent.'⁴⁷ The link with Italy was seen by Italophiles as stemming more from geological factors than from mere cultural and racial ties. Donati was also one of those who held this view. He considered the British attitude in Malta as autocratic and thought that the party of his sponsor, Lord Strickland, to be highly uncompromising. Still, he could not distinguish any sizeable difference between the Nationalist and Constitutional parties or that of the then newly-born Labour Party. He did not notice a lot of difference between surveillance of mail or censorship in fascist Italy and that of British Malta. In Malta, the prevalent Church censorship was incomprehensible for an academic who had lived on the continent. He was very emphatic on Maltese bureaucracy: very rotten – *scadentissima* – in spite of a century of military domination. He described the main political parties in Malta as in *half* mafiosi and in *half* fascist: a horrible sight as well as a mockery of freedom. In fact, he ends the paragraph by saluting them, *Me le saluti!*

Donati did not spare from his sights, or rage, the emerging *laburisti* who, though not strong in the polls, consisted of a variety of budding intellectuals soon to be squeezed in the political climate existing in that period of history. He used a term not yet commonly used at that time in Malta – *democristiana* as an appellation for the origin of the *laburisti*, after they were allied with the *nazionalisti*.⁴⁸

Since Donati was very keen on etymology, he placed the appellation of *nazionalisti* between inverted commas, implying it is just a name, sort of *nazionalistari* of ambiguous italianite credentials. In just six months experience of mingling among Nationalists, Donati concluded categorically that they used *italianità* as a pretext to cover all sorts of stale and hidden agendas.⁴⁹ He was destined to change direction when, in a few months' time, he was lured by Enrico Mizzi to enter his orbit. Though he claimed that Malta was an Italian island and the *italianità* crusade was at its peak, he could not understand the situation. He saw a mixture of the Orient and Italy but the sun compensated for all mishaps.

He reached a climax when he had to explain to Don Luigi Sturzo the privileged position of the Catholic Church in Malta, which acted as if it was still in the times of the *ancien régime*. He was extremely frank in his judgment, always considering that he was writing to a person who was himself a priest. Don Sturzo, who had made the political emancipation of Catholics in Italy



Dr Enrico Mizzi

his prime campaign, had himself crossed swords with his superiors at the Vatican over their appeasement of what he considered a fascist and pagan state. The principal canon of dogma of his party was unquestionably that of a secular state. Donati shared these values. Therefore, he was quite astonished with the fact that the Church was the largest private property holder in Malta, which he reckoned (erroneously) as amounting to two-thirds of the territory of Malta. What disturbed him most was ignorance and open-faced corruption added to privilege.⁵⁰ He lambasted the clergy for its conservative and domineering position and predicted that prevailing politico-religious controversy would

lead them in future to face a more aggressive challenge. Donati's liberal views about separation between Church and the State were not very different from that of his employer's party, the *stricklandiani*, for whom he expressed the view as being totally wrong – *abbiano torto marcio*.

He felt handicapped in the circumstances, living to use his own words, in seclusion – *l'esilio dentro l'esilio*. On the one hand, he was an exile from a totalitarian state and, on the other hand, he was at the same time a dependent of an institution whose master was vilifying the culture to which he was so much devoted. He promised himself to keep out of the unpleasant turf surrounding him. He emphatically affirmed 'to do whatever possible with pleasure not to side with anybody, but for this one must act cautiously.'⁵¹

The biographers of Donati, Angiulli and de Antonellis, described the chapter about the Malta connection as 'The solitude of Malta 1930-1931' (*La solitudine di Malta 1930-1931*). Donati suffered silently in Malta first and foremost because he was separated from his family. He felt that solitude produced a paralyzing melancholy (*malinconia paralizzante*) and he could hardly get out of his room. The letter he addressed to his mentor Sturzo, on 3 February 1931, represented his state of mind during his first few months

in Malta. He was generally happy with his job, disgruntled with the political situation in Italy and much more about that of Malta.

Vidya tried to raise his spirits by prefiguring the different Anglo-Saxon traditions he was going to experience the forthcoming Christmas such as that of the Christmas pudding.⁵² Nevertheless, he felt extremely lonely during the Christmas holidays of 1930 when the College was deserted since the boy boarders and the teachers went home to their families. Donati was on his own contemplating in this massive building. His strong character made use of this solo retreat with religious fervour while regenerating his will to cope with his scholastic tasks. The optimism with which he had started the year soon dwindled with the outbreak of an influenza spree which hit the entire College population.

He was very sick and suffered heart ailments. The time-table at St. Edward's was tough.⁵³ The man who was chosen to succeed him – Umberto Calosso – later on claimed that it was the strenuous routine that physically killed him.⁵⁴ However, this statement appears to be an exaggeration. The climate was good for his health. He found the Anglo-Maltese cuisine unpalatable to his tastes. The palate he tasted close to home was Signora Fabriani's Sunday fettucini – not quite, *quasi romagnoli!*⁵⁵ He had longed to go to Paris to taste his friend's Stragliati's cuisine as he believed that his home cooking would make him feel much better than any medicine.⁵⁶

He was not too enthusiastic about the British as they ate too much and practised brutal sports. He blamed the College diet to be the root for his maladies.⁵⁷ He also considered English grammar as bizarre. In order to ease his loneliness, he had toyed with the idea of bringing his daughter Severa to stay at the Sacred Heart Convent in St. Julians.⁵⁸ However, he was dissuaded as he had learnt that Reverend Mother Eleonora Buoncompagni, sister of the fascist governor of Rome, Principe Ludovisi-Buoncompagni, used to teach there. He thought that the college smelled almost fascist but he was determined to remain at his place of work even if he had to drop dead.

Donati and Malta's Lost Generation

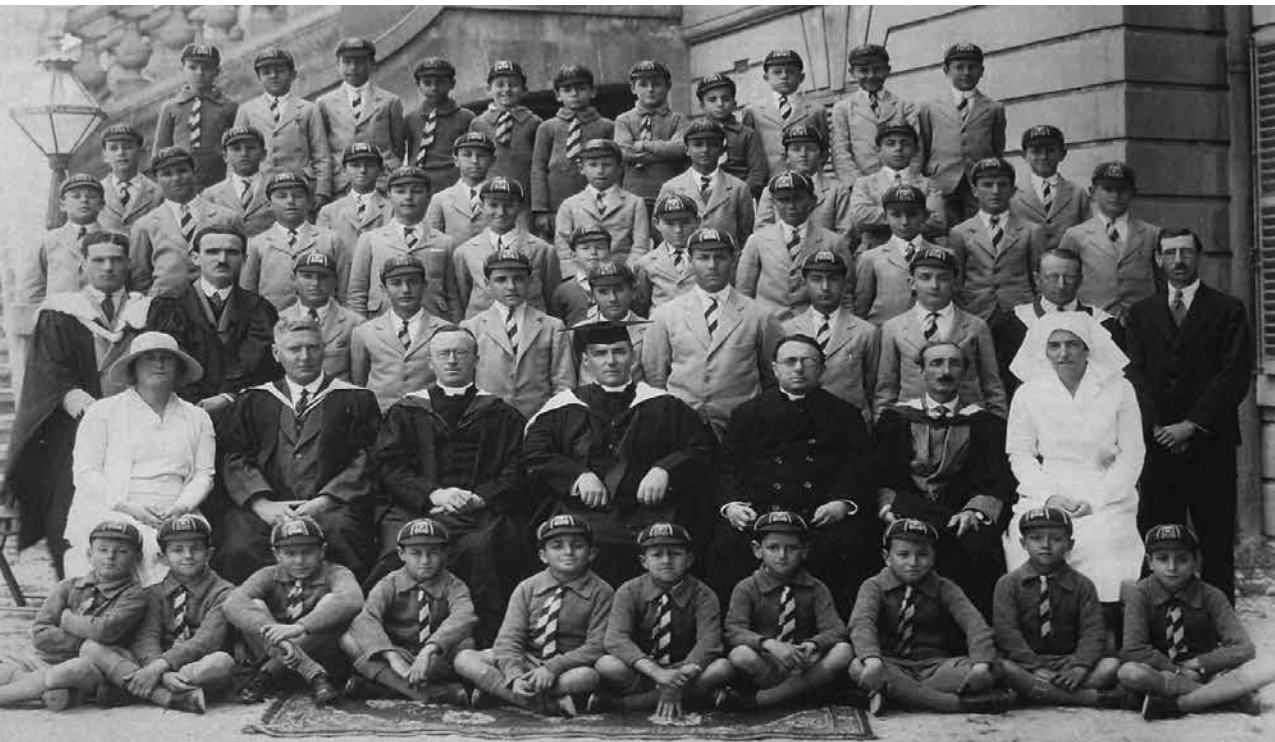
Donati's employment at St. Edward College hardly left him any free time. Still, as an observer, he was sufficiently absorbed in detecting what was happening outside the College's fence. He sensed what appeared to his tastes: a weird climate, both atmospherically as well as politically. In Malta, he expressed his views in the press anonymously on major controversies circulating in the island. Though he considered British rule as authoritarian,

yet he had first hand experience in freedom of the press in Malta. Just like Maltese journalist Giovanni Giglio, he had been an eye-witness to the burning of presses in Italy by fascist militias. He himself resisted the auto-censorship imposed by his superiors on the paper he edited, *Il Popolo*. The paper did not survive when state censorship became the order of the day. In fact, as already described *supra*, he had been severely intimidated to the extent that he had to run for his life and flee Italy.

So, one of his first vows as he landed in Malta, a sort of New Year's resolution, was not to have anything to do with the Maltese. This had nothing to do with snobbery or racism. However, he did not stay isolated at the College for long where he found the environment too rigid. Therefore, he went along where his friends Fabriani and Manfredi congregated. He could not miss meeting Maltese and other Italians whose views he did not necessarily agree with. Consequently, he was exposed to the Sunday's mass at Santa Caterina d'Italia in Valletta which was followed by a get-together at the now defunct *Café Premier* in Piazza Regina in Valletta (next to the Queen Victoria monument).

The Catholic activist Herbert Ganado remembered Donati very well in the company of his friends at the *Café Premier*. Cafés were places of encounter where friends could meet, exchange news and gossip, drink coffee, and play chess. It was time to sit and contemplate, to dream and observe life.⁵⁹

Group photo St Edward College 1931-32. Giuseppe Donati is in the third row, second from left.



Malta's own Literary Café at Piazza Regina as seen by Candido Giglio in the 1930's.

Mostly the *Café* was a place to talk and argue on any subject especially on the invincibility of the British Empire or, alternatively, its inevitable decline. Ganado described the scene thus:

In the nineteen thirties after evening mass at St. Catherine's and on Sunday mornings, my friends and I met at the *Café Premier*. We were a mixed bag of diverse nationalities. Our meetings reflected similar encounters between Rome's intellectual elite at *Café Greco*. Professor Donati, a renowned antifascist who taught Italian at St. Edward's College, was a cultured man, known for his fine wit and a leading exponent of Don Sturzo's Catholic Party then hounded by Mussolini.⁶⁰

This description of the character of Donati coincides with the one expressed by St. Edward's student Maurice Micallef Eynaud: 'A gentle man, full of humour, he was much admired by the staff and senior boys, for he was most *simpatico*.'⁶¹ He recalled that the Italian professor was a very good teacher of high moral principles. The mere perusal of the medley of letters edited by Augusto Benelli, selected by his daughter Suor Severa Donati,



Suor Severa Donati

portrays vividly Micallef Eynaud's recollections, to which he added that he was always in pain and in poor health. Ganado also reminisced one of Donati's witty comments about Mussolini, namely: 'Although Mussolini has stripped the Italian people down to their nightshirt he has succeeded in convincing them they wear Roman togas.'⁶² Ganado added how puzzled Donati was with the curious way *Malta* was distributed. '*Malta* reminds me of a bankrupt who dares leave his house only at dusk. An old man hides the newspaper under a jacket, slips it under doors and distributes a publication that stationers do not sell.'⁶³

There was a reason why a typical reader of *Malta* would either show off himself holding the paper in public or else conceal it. It was one way to brand one's

Nationalist identification, sometimes in defiance or else for the opposite reason. There were those who were scared to show their political leanings in public due to the high polarization of politics in Malta. Since many party supporters did not bother to buy the paper from a newsagent, the editor promoted distribution by subscription thereby enticing readership, thus monitoring its circulation. Ganado continued quoting that Enrico Mizzi had often warned that, 'If we distribute *Malta* to shops and stationers we are sure to lose most of our subscribers. Although they promise to buy the paper they will never do so.'⁶⁴

Malta's *Café Greco* clique was a vibrant crowd of young intellectuals. The animated life of most of them was destined to be stained with bad luck by the thunder of the twilight brewing in Europe during that point in time. Donati had already experienced the life of a lost generation while in Paris in company of Italian émigrés. The Maltese version was more relaxed than the Italian scene in Paris though the fate of some patrons of the *Café Premier* was to end tragically. In the end, the reminiscences of the past war were to be superseded by a worse replica in the war that eventually followed.

The *Premier* elite included Herbert Kiesler, a German teacher selected by Monsignor Albert Pantalleresco to teach the German language at the Lyceum. Kiesler was twenty-five, attractive and was a hit with the girls strolling up and down Valletta's *Strada Reale* (to-day's Republic Street). He later married Emma Masci who was a teacher of Italian at the 'Secondary School for young ladies' in Valletta. Masci was reported by the Italian Consul Silenzi as an acquaintance of both Donati and Fabriani.⁶⁵ As war approached, the British



Herbert Kiesler known by Donati as 'the messenger of Maltese anti-fascists'.



Arnaldo Fabriani

security authorities interned all aliens, including Kiesler, who were in Malta irrespective of their antifascist beliefs. He was interned immediately after the Nazi offensive on Poland, but was released on 12 March 1940. The couple succeeded in reaching Italy before the declaration of war as otherwise they would have faced the same consequences as their other friends – deportation. Monsignor Pantalleresco kept in touch through correspondence, even with Kiesler, while exiled in Uganda.⁶⁶ Kiesler together with Emma continued teaching in Italy after the end of hostilities and were also active in the translations of books from German and English into Italian. They befriended the Calosso family when he became a Member of Parliament living in Rome.

The veteran of the *Premier* group was Arnaldo Fabriani, who had been teaching at the Lyceum since 15 September 1924. Fabriani shared with Donati the same ideological roots, that of the Partito Popolare. During his stay at Malta, he was considered by friend and foe – Maltese, Italians and the British – as 'one of the best and most active defenders of Italian culture in Malta.' He did so at the 'risk of his position as teacher in a government school.' Fabriani was close to the Nationalist echelons, especially Enrico Mizzi, but was known for not fostering openly fascist sympathies. In all probability he was a spy. The British and the Italian security forces had ambiguous impressions about him for different reasons. He contributed to the evolution of school books

with a local context through the publication of the series *Fior del Mondo*, thus becoming the precursor in the field to works such as E.B. Vella's series of *Äabra ta' Ward*, later followed by *Id-Denfil* (Camilleri, Fenech & Mifsud, 1974). While books printed in English focused on several British history episodes, Fabriani's books concentrated on both Italian and Maltese themes for the first time. It is held that, during the course of Fabriani's teaching at the Lyceum, his students were encouraged to come forward with legends taken from Maltese traditions. He published these short stories in three volumes under the pseudonym of Aldo Farini entitled *Fiabe, tradizioni e leggende Maltesi*. The book was illustrated with cartoons by the budding young artist Willie Apap and emphasized the affinities and similarities with Sicilian stories.⁶⁷ The famed Maltese poet and novelist, Äuñè Chetcuti, translated into Maltese some of Farini's tales, *Ärejjeġ ta' Äääan u Stejjer Oära* (Äääan Tales and Other Stories, 1997) and *Gäär Äassan u Ärejjeġ Oära* (Gäär Äassan and Other Tales, 1998), featuring Maltese popular narratives; noticeably among them were a number of Äääan tales. Fabriani continued to teach at the Lyceum and promoting Italian culture among the students through the Carlo Goldoni Company till the very eve of the war. He was among the passengers who saw the first air bombardments while on board the *Calitea*, bound for Sicily. The late Guido de Marco, former President of Malta, remembered the day when the Italians living in Malta were compelled to leave the island on Italy's declaration of war. His family expressed concern about 'the possible fate of Professor Arnaldo Fabriani as, being an antifascist, they were sure he might have a difficult time returning to Italy.'⁶⁸ Anyway, all is well that ends well. Fabriani survived the war.

After the overthrow of Mussolini, Fabriani became provincial secretary of the *Democrazia Cristiana* for the region of L'Aquila. He was chosen to the Constituent Assembly in 1946 and was elected a Member of Parliament in the first and second legislatures (1948-53). Fabriani came into the picture after the war when Dom Mintoff, during the sitting of the Legislative Assembly of 5 November 1948, mentioned the revelation in then recently-published Ciano diaries of Enrico Mizzi's meetings with Mussolini. In the polemic that followed, Fabriani came to Mizzi's rescue. Over the years, he came to see his friends in Malta several times and was an active member of *Associazione Amici di Malta* in Rome after Malta's independence.

There was also another Lyceum master, the fascist Giovanni Calabritto, among the *Premier* assemblage. He is described by Herbert Ganado as a 'hothead' while his pupil Anthony Miceli Farrugia portrayed him as 'highly capricious with a nervous personality, a squint and visual features



Camillo Bonanno

that are difficult to describe.'⁶⁹ Way back in 1925, the Constitutionalist member of the Legislative Assembly Edwin Vassallo complained about Calabritto as being a 'rather severe disciplinarian' who struck and kicked out of the class a 14-year old boy.⁷⁰ Calabritto was married to one of the habitués *Premier salotto*, Elena Maria Borg daughter of Professor Carlo Borg, the founder of the *Umberto Primo* school. At the peak of the Ethiopian war, the Defence Security Office in Malta kept a dossier about Italian 'undesirables' that were bound to be deported. Calabritto was on this list together with Fabriani and the Latin professor at the University, Umberto Moricca. Fabriani was spared deportation but not Calabritto

and his colleague Giovanna Costa together with Moricca. Calabritto protested vigorously against the deportation order, which was officially justified as being 'conductive to the public good.'⁷¹ He contended that he was personally innocent of any sort of accusation.⁷² He added that the arbitrary acts committed would be detrimental to his future benefits for a pension which would accrue to his wife and children.

Elena Maria Borg followed her husband to Rome on deportation. She eventually separated from him and, in the court proceedings that followed, was given the custody of their only child. As a fully fledged Italian citizen, she worked with *Radio Roma*, where she broadcasted daily at the beginning of the war and was dubbed in Malta as Lady Haw-Haw.⁷³ At the beginning of hostilities, her custody of her daughter was removed by the Court of Salerno's decree stating that it was inopportune to leave the custody of the little girl in the hands of a British subject.⁷⁴ She was very much offended with the verdict. The President of the *Regia Deputazione della storia maltese* Francesco Ercole appealed on her behalf asserting that she had fervently promoted *l'italianità* of her country of birth.⁷⁵ In the end Calabritto did not live up to his professed reputation because he murdered his wife on 3 August 1940 leaving his only daughter an orphan. He was charged in Court, found guilty and sentenced to

a long prison term. Having benefited from an amnesty on the establishment of the Italian Republic, he struggled to find his place in society but, in a moment of mental weakness, he committed suicide.⁷⁶

If the *Premier* group had been constituted as club, it would have had to include a Spiritual Director with Monsignor Albert Pantalleresco having that role. Like Ganado, he was interned and deported to Uganda probably for his zeal to the Francoist cause in the Spanish Civil War. Other patrons included Papas Chetta Schirò, Alexander Hamilton Stilon and Vincenzo Bonello. Schirò, who hailed from Piana degli Albanesi in Sicily, was the rector of the Greek Catholic Church in Valletta dedicated to Our Lady of Damascus. He was considered by the authorities as an Italian spy. Bonello was responsible for setting up the Fine Arts Section within the Museums Department. Because of his Italian sympathies and close association with the *Partito Nazionale*, he was dismissed by the British authorities in February 1937.⁷⁷ The last two were deported to Uganda in 1942. In the case of Stilon, not even the good offices of Edward R. Mifsud, the former Secretary to the Government would spare him from the doom inflicted on the intellectual crowd who dreamt of a *Malta Italica*.⁷⁸



Greek Catholic Church in Valletta dedicated to Our Lady of Damascus.

A more distant witness who frequented was Camillo Bonanno. Bonanno would later be selected for an elite military squad known as *Centro Militare 'G'* organised in anticipation of an eventual invasion of Malta in 1942. Being a fascist, he did not see eye to eye with Donati at the time. He changed his opinion when he later met Giuseppe Manfredi in Rome who disclosed Donati's relationship with Mizzi. In an aide-memoir Bonanno wrote very late in his life, he expressed a feeling of guilt for his precipitated judgment in respects of an Italian of pure anti-fascist breed.⁷⁹

Enrico Mizzi was to top the list of the amiable group who, in one way or another, suffered some sort of misfortune. Like some of his friends, he was deported to Uganda. After the war, he returned to what was once his *salotto*, *Piazza Regina* was still there, but the surroundings of what is to-day Kingsway Palace, part of the Grand Master Palace and the Court of Laws had been demolished by enemy action. The present author, when still a boy, remembers the same *salotto* with a much more restricted number of followers at a time when he was once more leader of the *Partito Nazionale* and, for about three months, Prime Minister of Malta, As in Donati's time, Enrico Mizzi returned to his alcove after attending the Sunday eleven o'clock mass at St. John's Cathedral.

For the great majority of the *Premier* crowd, it was indeed a *lost generation* because the vivacious youthfulness which bonded them together through their ideals was to follow them with tragedy some way or another. Donati was the first one to go, followed by Papas Chetta who died after a severe illness, the result of a malaria infection contacted in Albania.⁸⁰ Ganado was the last one to pass away, in 1979.

Defending Italian culture in Malta

At Malta, Giuseppe Donati was surrounded by what may be termed his *amici di sventura* who became haunted with bad luck. The Italian Consulate spied profusely on him with his presence among the Nationalist elite at the *Café Premier* being noted by the Italian Consul, Guglielmo Silenzi who was quick to send to his superiors in Rome the first article written anonymously by Donati for Mizzi's *Malta* on 28 April 1931 entitled *La questione linguistica e la realtà*. The Consul confirmed that the information was given to him by Enrico Mizzi himself. In his report, Silenzi pointed to Fabriani as the person who linked Donati to Mizzi.⁸¹ However, according to Pietro Ardizzone, Donati did not reap any financial benefit from his *Malta* articles.⁸²

Donati's writing was so significant to the irredentist agenda that



Annibale Scicluna Sorge with Alberto Sordi (*top*); with Giulio Andreotti (*bottom*).

publisher Raffaele Giusti of Livorno decided to reproduce posthumously a compilation of twenty articles written and published in *Malta*. To give the writings an added impact, a preface by Annibale Scicluna Sorge, a nephew of Sir Hannibal Scicluna,⁸³ was added to the book. Scicluna Sorge was 'a man for all seasons.' From a Nationalist in Malta, he turned fascist in Italy working for the Ministry for Propaganda. At the crucial point of the transition to democracy, he was probably acting as a double agent. He later embraced a Christian Democrat linkage close to Giulio Andreotti's faction. In this role, he has been described by Italian film director Mario Monicelli as a fascist who survived the fall of the regime and who, on leaving Malta, had gone to Italy ready to deliver his country of origin to Mussolini. Scicluna Sorge survived the downfall of fascism apparently unscathed. Elisabetta Salicetti,⁸⁴ who reviewed Giusti's compilation entitled *Gli scritti di Giuseppe Donati sul 'Malta': apologia e retorica*, held some reservations about the authorship of Donati since the attribution is based on indications found at the publisher's records. But the report by Silenzi, quoted earlier speaks for itself. Fabriani himself was the trustee of this compilation of articles. Even contemporaries like Ganado recalled that the former Editor of *Il Popolo* had contributed regularly to *Malta* but had penned his articles under a pseudonym.⁸⁵

Henry Frendo has asserted that, academically speaking, Enrico Mizzi was not a shining star.⁸⁶ Yet he succeeded in finding people of the calibre of Donati who outshined everybody else just as noted in the Silenzi report. Mizzi was always looking for collaborators for his paper and he was delighted to find valid persons like Donati who could write front page articles in defence of his opinions. He was not bothered with their credentials, fiercely anti-fascist in Donati's case.⁸⁷

Donati focused on the same topics argued by some Nationalists during



Donati's *Malta* anthology.

the controversy commonly referred to as the 'language question.' Having been a convincing polemicist in Italy, he was therefore well-qualified for such an assignment. It did not matter that his articles were frequently an open attack on his ultimate boss, Gerald Strickland. Though he defended *italianità*, he distanced himself from the fascist design of irredentism. Even though Malta was under military rule, its assimilation with the Kingdom of Italy would have meant integration with a dictatorship – something Donati fought against. Nevertheless, the freedom of press in Malta, irrespective of defects ascribed to it, was definitely more liberal than the press in Italy. While he repeated the same Nationalist arguments, his journalistic skills emerged to make each article look more of an academic paper than a propaganda piece.

Like his successor Calosso, he befriended a young teacher at St. Edward's – Edward Scicluna, son of Sir Hannibal Scicluna. A former Rhodes Scholar, at the beginning he was the only Maltese national teaching at the College where, apart from instructing in Mathematics and Geography, he also acted as Sports Master. Scicluna shared with Donati original documents retrieved from the Consulate of the Kingdom of Sardinia about Bourbon émigrés in Malta.⁸⁸

In his contributions, Donati invoked historical figures of the calibre of Mikiel Anton Vassalli, Giovanni Francesco Abela, Gio Antonio Ciantar, Annibale Preca, Domenico Magri and Giuseppe and Michele Bellanti. Apart from these scholars, he included internationally-known academics such as the archaeologist Thomas Ashley, who had written in the *Journal of Roman Studies* (1915) about Roman Malta. Donati also included Phillipus Cluverius, famous for his opus *Sicilia Aniqua cum minoribus insulis, item Sardinia et Corsica* (Leyden 1619) and discussed contemporary thinkers such as Benedetto Croce and Bertrand Russell as well as author Arthur Conan Doyle. He brought to his support the noted Orientalist Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930) in his arguments with the critics of *Italianità*. He asserted that the total substitution of Italian with Maltese was first and foremost fallacious due to the clear difference as to what constitutes a dialect as distinct from a language. He hypothesised that *il grande semitista* Nöldeke would have called them amateurs linguists.⁸⁹ In taking this stance in the language-dialect dispute, Donati was unconsciously embracing a policy promoted by what he considered to be the devil incarnate, Benito Mussolini himself. According to Salicetti's evaluation of Donati's *mélange*, the fascist regime was not just combating the eradication of foreign words from Italian language, but primarily the dialects.⁹⁰

Still, the tune played by Donati pleased the ear of his sponsor Enrico Mizzi. For that reason, he identified Strickland as an italphobe. He maintained

that Strickland's dislike of anything that was Italian was the antecedent to fascism.⁹¹ A glimpse at the titles of the articles is enough to show the high-pitched tone used in the *Malta* articles.⁹² Donati was accustomed to write and think what he felt even when living in a fascist state, so he felt he did not have to adjust his style in Malta where, despite the fact that the island was a British fortress ruled from faraway London, he and his patron Enrico Mizzi behaved as if the island was just a Borough of London. The rich vocabulary and the literary style of the intellectual content when pursuing a political argument was distinctive when compared to the other pieces appearing on the Nationalist newspapers. Some of the theses put forward by Donati were identical to those of Mizzi and other authors. Yet the quality of Italian grammar used in the writing of propaganda material, including the editorials of the newspapers, was somewhat poor. Strickland himself actually teased the Nationalists for their lack of proficiency in the Italian language.

Superlatives used in the expression of arguments were exceedingly harsh. He made use of his masterly vocabulary to describe the forms of detestation used by Lord Strickland regarding Italian. In a *Malta* article entitled *Fandonie Stricklandiane*, Donati held Strickland responsible for 'having plagued, persecuted, abused, slandered, provoked, mocked, trampled on, ignored, quibbled and falsified anything that was Italian in Malta or even anything which recalled the indissoluble links which our race [Maltese] and our history shared with Italy.'⁹³ However, in order not to fall in the monotony of repeating the noun *menzognie* or *bugie*, he harmonized this rich vocabulary with an equally rich and not so commonly used noun *fandonia* to replace the more abrasive noun *bugie*. The appropriate English translation for *fandonia* would be *damned lies*. He was not at all disturbed that he was addressing a person of the calibre of Strickland. What was injurious in calling the Constitutionalist leader a *Gran Meticcio* in addition to the already abundant *renegade*? The word is coined from the Spanish *mestizo*, a crossbreed. Although nowadays the meaning of the word is usually applied to a racially mixed individual, the word had a derogatory implication at the time. If, as stated earlier, Ganado and his friends knew that Donati wrote in *Malta*, Strickland or the spies paid by the British must also have been aware of this same fact. Consul Silenzi had reported that Donati, though an employee of the College founded by Lady Strickland, refused to meet her husband.⁹⁴ Donati felt that Strickland regarded the Italian language as the language of story tellers, *cantastorie* or the nineteenth-century's version of to-day's *veline* – *delle ballerine*.

Donati adopted the Nationalist Party stand against Strickland's Phoenician theory, which he called: *menzogna fenicofila*. He contested Strickland's qualms

The recurring squabble of equating anglicisation with Protestantism was also picked up in this Donati's *episolario*. He asserted that, once the British succeeded in abolishing Italian from being a national language (which they did in 1934), nothing could stop them from replacing the official Roman Catholic religion to Protestant.¹⁰⁰ But Donati did not stop there. He compared the prospects of anglicisation with the way yeast is quoted in the Gospels, Herod's yeast, which is an appalling stinking yeast that looked like Herod whose zeal was to dominate the masses. This was the argument for the safeguarding of *Italianità* for the benefit of young generations.

There was hardly an angle of Maltese history which Donati did not tackle. His last article in the series, *Statistica liberescia e realtà culturale* appeared on the edition of 25 June 1931 – just a week before his final departure from Malta. The Strickland press reported an extract of the Royal Commission in connection with the number of books imported in Malta in year 1929-39. The top of the list were books in English with 17,427 out of a total of 33,693; this was followed by 9,074 in Maltese, while 6,416 were in Italian, leaving a total of 340 for other languages. Consequently, this piece of information was interpreted by anglophiles as a letdown for the defence of Italian culture in Malta. Donati gave a different interpretation stating that it was quality than ought to have been considered: a fiction book was reckoned as less important than a philosophy text-book. Still, the trend in a higher number of books in English continued. The 1936 annual report of the Maltese library revealed that in one year alone, the number of English books purchased totalled 888, whereas only 153 Italian books were acquired, even less than those in French which numbered 216.¹⁰¹

The monograph *In difesa della civiltà Italiana a Malta*¹⁰² was one of several books written in that period arguing in favour of Italian culture in Malta. This was preceded and followed by Arrigo Solmi, *Malta e la sua storia* (1930); Benvenuto Cellini, *Malta e la politica Stricklandiana* (1931); Guido Puccio, *Il conflitto Anglo-Maltese* (1933); and Mario Rossi, *La Dominazione Inglese a Malta fino al 1860* (1935). A book by the Sicilian Antonio Prestinenza, *Gli inglesi a Malta*, was printed in 1935 while another one bearing same title published in 1938, that is *Gli inglesi a Malta*, was written by the post-war Social Democrat leader Luigi Preti.¹⁰³ It was milder in tone as it was written during the Anglo-Italian rapprochement known as the *Gentlemen's Agreement*. For an unknown reason, this book is not usually listed in Preti's extensive bibliography. One of his best-sellers, a novel written about life in Italy under fascism, was *Giovinezza, Giovinezza*.¹⁰⁴

It seemed that, after the closure of the Istituto di Cultura in 1936 and the

subsequent expulsion of Italians alleged to be spies, the *italianità* apologists took a break. Enrico Mizzi published in 1939 a collection of letters with British authorities expounding his various arguments entitled *Cinque anni di lotta politica a Malta*. Adriano Colocci Vespucci, who earlier in the century shared the inspiration with Mizzi of exchanging Malta with Eritrea, came out of hibernation in 1939 and published *Le origine della passione di Malta*. Culture, language and civilisation could no longer be reasonably defended with the real *passione di Malta*.

Anybody and anything starting from the *Acts of the Apostles* focusing on St. Paul and St. Luke was good enough to suit the defence of Italian culture in Malta. In the end, Donati's controversial effort to enlighten the debate showed that some personalities were valid scholars such as Thomas Ashley and Phillipus Cluverius. These intellectuals were amongst the sources used in the treatise written by Professor Mario Buhagiar, the Dean of the Department of History of Art University of Malta, about the early Christian connection in Malta.¹⁰⁵ Eighty-three years after the death of Theodor Nöldeke, he is still reckoned as a primary Orientalist. Another major Orientalist explains, in a way, the interpretation given by Donati for Nöldeke who, being a Hellenist showed his love for Greece by curiously displaying a positive dislike of the Orient which, after all, was what he had studied as a scholar.¹⁰⁶ Other than that, it was an apologetic exercise with a heavy accentuation of rhetoric.

The energy involved in the production of all these publications fizzled in the air together with the smoke produced following the fateful appointment with destiny: the declaration of war by Mussolini on 10 June 1940 – *l'ora segnata dal destino*

By 8 June 1940, one hundred and twenty-two *Savoia Marchetti* 79s had arrived in Sicily poised to attack Malta.¹⁰⁷ The fatal hour marked the beginning of the Siege of Malta – *L'Inferno di Malta*, when one fine day the countryside surrounding Comiso, Gela and Catania was deafened with the noise emanating from engines warming up before they took off for their destination: *Malta*.¹⁰⁸ The start of the bombardments over Malta on 11 June 1940 marked the end of *italianità*. Yet the fascist columnist Ezio Maria Gray, in his *Le terre nostre ritornarono: Malta, Corsica, Nizza* (1940) seemed to be just a wistful poet when he described the aerial bombings as an attachment to *terra irridenta*. Up to the time of his writing about Malta, the *Regia Aeronautica* had performed just 22 incursions.¹⁰⁹ The last Italian apologist to defend the myth of *Malta Italianissima* was Agostino Savelli, who in his *Storia di Malta, dai primordi ai giorni nostri* justified the aerial attacks on Malta by stating that 'Italy was in dire necessity to use its most efficient weapons so as to block and



Piazza Venezia, 10 June 1940, declaration of war.



starve the enemy together with the inhabitants while in the course of action ruining the island so dear to the heart of every Italian yet so dangerous in enemy hands.¹¹⁰

The empirical substance of the various hypotheses reached its expiry date on the decisive act by Mussolini to go to war. When peace in Europe was eventually restored, the language question had another dimension detached from the several decades of worthless rhetoric. The teaching of Italian in Malta became purely that of another foreign language competing with others already taught in Malta such as French, German and, later on, Spanish.

Premature end to Paris summer holiday

Typical of a great survivor, Donati's position in Malta was paradoxical and almost confused. The condition caused by the deprivation of the presence of his family for six years was aggravated by his precarious state of health. He showed great willpower, determined to overcome the difficulties, physical, physiological and financial which bordered on trauma. When he settled in Paris as his choice for exile, he felt the political and the climatic environment to be rather stifling. Worse still, his residence in Malta separated him from the grand anti-fascist assembly in France. The internal troubles between the different parties of the anti-fascist resistance had created critical differences between him and his colleagues.

Therefore, the Malta interlude was considered an attraction considering the lure of financial gain as well as other circumstances. His state of health on his departure from France was serious. The anti-fascist cell in Malta, if there ever was one, was insignificant and had practically no role in the struggle against Mussolini in Italy. For Donati, the Malta break served to ease the tension of having to face several fronts. However, his friends in Malta took advantage of him for their own agenda. The *Malta* series of articles was a case in point.

He could sense that he was nearing the end as his ability to resist was becoming weaker. He felt that he should not end his turbulent life on a Mediterranean rock, *scoglio mediterraneo*, away from the friends who shared his same ideals and this notwithstanding the respect he enjoyed in Malta. While Vidya kept him informed to the minuscule detail of a family life without a father-husband, he did not reveal the true state of his sufferings in his *epistles* to his wife.

Therefore, he decided to take advantage of the summer holidays and rush to Paris.¹¹¹ Though his medical condition made him feel miserable at times,

De Bono over the Matteotti affair. After the death of their colleague, they pooled together the sum of 1000 francs to cover the funeral expenses. The tomb had no commemorative inscription, no cross – nothing to indicate the burial place of the *incomparable d'écrivain*, the talented and unique writer who sought neither honours nor wealth. His closest friend Francesco Luigi Ferrari, who would follow the young champion of freedom to the grave within eighteen months, opened a public subscription for the erection of a commemorative plaque in his memory.¹¹⁶

The news of the death of the fearless journalist spread like wildfire. Two days after his death, the *Corriere della Sera* heralded both the demise of Donati and the belated restitution of citizenship by the Italian Government. Stragliati informed Vidya Donati about the death of her husband and tried to console her, avowing that she must consider herself proud to have been the partner of such a noble and great person.¹¹⁷ Vidya and her children, including one who never personally met her father when alive, had to wait for the overthrow of Mussolini to see the mortal remains of their beloved one transported to his birthplace Faenza on 8 May 1947.

Vidya Donati Morici's epitaph¹¹⁸

Forgive me, even if so far, I have not had the strength to reply with words to your kind and many letters.

In my heart I have already thanked you infinitely for having come so spontaneously, so sympathetically, to my sorrow! But it is too inhuman not to find comfort anywhere. Even to-day, over a week after the terrible blow, I seem to be dazed and cannot recover. I cannot convince myself that it is all over, that there is not a ray of hope, that the sacrifice of that heroic soul is over, before the quaffing of the cruel sentence which for six years has agonised our life. I feel that my adored one is still there, waiting, for me and the children, poor little mites, of whom only two can remember their poor father, the youngest, sweet Fiametta, who came to take the sad place of her departed little brother, was the living pledge (so he always said) that God would not let him die without seeing her, without holding her in his arms. And now she is an orphan; she will never know on this earth the love of her father. Think of it. Not even to receive the last blessing of a dying father, not even to see him dead were we allowed to move! It is atrocious, it is inhuman. It is maddening! Believe me, never have I craved so much, never have I felt the cruelty of separation, the paralysing pangs of poverty as in these terrible days. And above all, I have envied those who, by their love and brotherly acts, earned the right to call themselves his second family; those dear ones, meeting him in his exile, understood immediately what a good heart, what a heroic soul he had and proffering a helping hand, loved him like a brother. You, who has been one of these friends, you can understand and realise all my gratitude, you can more easily understand how being separated by force from such a man has been an intolerable agony; and now having lost him for ever, I feel twice widowed, deprived of all strength, of all light. Oh, allow me to say it, he was superior, an extraordinary being, an adorable

companion, a tender father; such a generous soul, so full of faith, a real soldier of Christ and of every noble cause, always courageous, in war, in peace, as a soldier, as a citizen: Courageous above all in the face of infinite small miseries of life, where moral strength his heart was capable of. One would have thought that the soul had made his body heroic too. He had accustomed us to such miracles. He had overcome so many mortal crises practically with the mere strength of will. How often he fell ill and recovered. So much so that he hoped that his constitution would also this time enable him to pull through. How I prayed! Be so good as to tell me, you who certainly were with him until he left Malta, was he really so very bad on his departure? His last letters from Malta, dated the 15th and 30th June did not show (perhaps not to alarm me) such a bad state of affairs. I am inclined to think that the strain of the long trip to Paris was too much for his body, so full of physical and moral wounds. And yet, on his arrival in Paris, he had the strength (exquisite delicacy of heroic souls) to remember with a dear telegram, the birthday of the second daughter, "Grazia dearest Grazia." But I fear that in Paris, it was only a body upheld by superhuman will that arrived. And immediately he had to bear, through the tortures of a perhaps too energetic cure (injections in the spine, in the chest) an agony of a month and a half; an agony which I can now imagine, if I am to judge from my sorrow, and which I continually reconstruct for the torturing need of the soul, which wants to feel all so as to remember all. (You do understand? You do not think I am mad?), But his letters of July only mention the need of peace and rest; the sentiments and thoughts of the living could not break through that opaque zone that surrounds the dying, a terrible, an infallible sign.

Who is now to give me the strength to live for my darling children, when my only wish is to go as soon as possible to join my dear departed ones? The prayers of the good must help me, God's helping hand must hold me up, must strengthen me in the hard life that lies before me, above all to fight the temptation of death. No wonder my dearest husband used to worry when he thought [about] the future of his children. It is simply tragic. It is a question of having no bread for to-morrow; and no hopes of earning it, in this country, where there is no work for anyone proudly bearing a name like ours, and wanting to remain faithful to it.

Should I ever be free again to leave this country, I want to look abroad for any work that I can possibly get. I should like to go to the places where my dear one worked and suffered so nobly. In the meantime, while this cruel, hateful imprisonment continues, I cannot get away; I have no relatives, no friends, who could perform those duties which one ought to perform in such circumstances. I must therefore beg you, who have shown yourself so eager to help me, to undertake, like one of the family, all such formalities, and to dispose as you may think best of all that remained in the room occupied by my husband; books, photos, personal effects, letters, etc. taking account of what could be for you and us a remembrance of the dear man. It is understood that I extend every facility to you and also to the Rev. Father Rector of St. Edward College, to whom, please express on my behalf, my gratitude for his help and understanding to my husband, and for the sympathy in my sorrow. I beg you to do the same to all who have sent the expression of their sympathy assuring them that my soul really benefited by such kindness. To you, who have succeeded in comforting me in my sorrow and in inspiring me much confidence (I assure you that to me, no one, not even my parents, would I have spoken, so lengthily and unrestrainedly, even at the cost of trespassing on your goodness) may a handshake convey the expression of my deepest gratitude. Please remember me to your dear family [that] surrounded my husband with so much courtesy and kindness and which now sympathises so warmly with me in my bereavement.

The College's Silver Collection

Vidya became desperate with the loss of her husband, having as a result been deprived of his financial support. To the very end, the fascist regime refused to let her join her husband in exile. She knew about his complaints about the scirocco but she did not imagine that he was in such a bad shape while reading his last letters. She could not reconcile herself with the cruel doom that fell upon her family.

Upon Donati's death, Fabriani who, while in Malta, was very close to the Faenza intellectual, wrote a letter to the widow suggesting that she should write a letter to the Lieutenant Governor explaining her plight. Immediately, she appealed to the Secretary of the Lieutenant-Governor Edward R. Mifsud for financial assistance. The Rector of St. Edward College had already met Don Sturzo and Professor Crespi in London at the beginning of September 1931. According to what Sturzo told McClement, 'Dr Donati's wife has rather gone over to the fascists for the sake of her children.'¹¹⁹ This version conformed to the hearsay circulating in Italy at the time of his death, therefore considered as a fact once it was also registered in archival records. William Godwin pleaded in 'Of History and Romance,' in 1797: 'Nothing is more uncertain, more contradictory more unsatisfactory than the evidence of facts.'¹²⁰

The allegation that Mrs. Donati changed sides cannot be taken at face value. A lot of the hundreds of OVRA archival material has been literally excavated by Professor Mimmo Franzinelli. He asserts that stories like those repeated by McClement, namely that Mrs. Donati had a liaison with a fascist chief, was one of the several stories conceived by the regime to discredit renowned anti-fascists.¹²¹

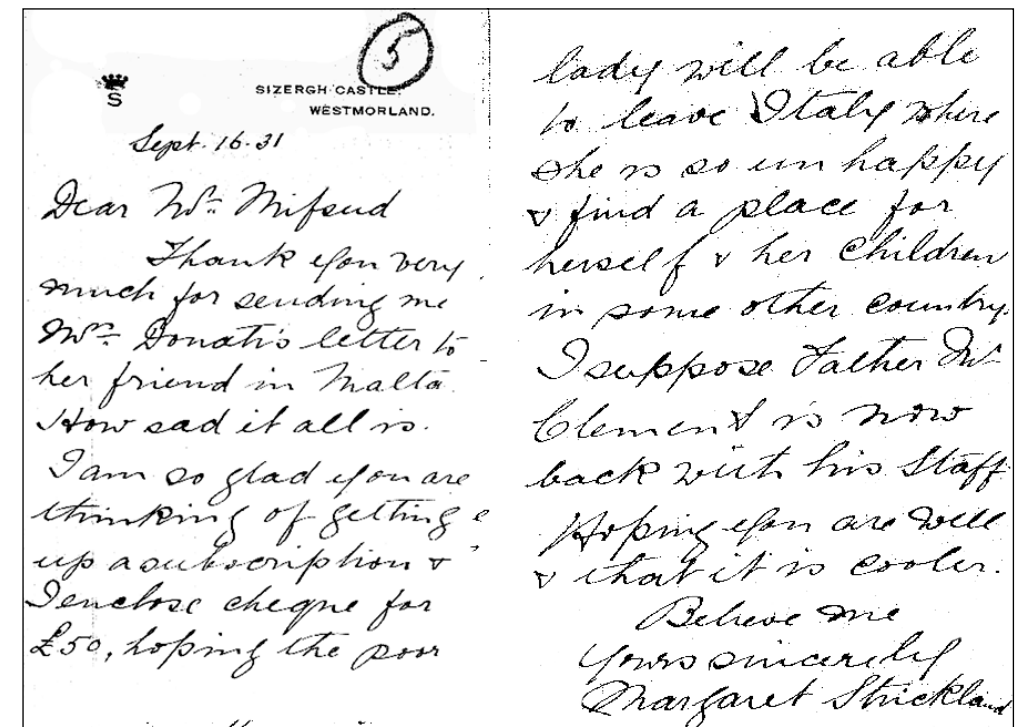
There was hardly anything in Malta which could escape the attention of the Lieutenant-Governor's office. With or without self government, this office was the Office of the Prime Minister *de facto*. Mifsud was always ready to give a helping hand without prejudice to one's viewpoints. Therefore, he consulted the government's attorney Philip Pullicino suggesting the opening of a subscription in the College with proceeds destined for Mrs Donati. Mifsud promptly reported to Lady Margaret Strickland at Westmorland about what the Rector had informed him after his trip to London. He also divulged that a replacement for Donati was appointed: Umberto Calosso. She was quick to write a cheque for fifty pounds as the initial contribution. Lady Strickland was not only generous in writing a cheque without much ado, but also of expressing her thoughts. She augured:

I am so glad you are thinking of getting up a subscription. I enclose cheque for £50, hoping the poor lady be able to leave Italy where she is unhappy and find a place for herself and her children in some other country.¹²²

Mifsud was also swift to acknowledge receipt of Vidya Donati Morici's letter of the 15 September as well as to notify Lady Strickland that they had already informed Donati's widow of her generous donation.¹²³ Mrs. Donati, like her late husband, was not lost in her choice of words. She showed her appreciation in the following terms:

I wish to express at once to all my deep gratitude, above all for the respect so spontaneously paid to the rare virtues of my husband. And now that I have been able to learn your name and address I am happy to be able to thank you personally and to ask you to be so good as to extend this expression of my gratitude to Rev. Father Rector of the College, who was so generous in his understanding towards my husband during his stay in Malta, and to all the other Fathers and Professors.¹²⁴

Lady Strickland's cheque was sent on 30 October 1931, while the contribution by the teachers and parents, fifty pounds and seven pence



Lady Strickland's letter to Edward R. Mifsud, enclosing a cheque to be forwarded to Mrs. Donati.

reached the widow by the 25 January 1932. This was a considerable amount of money, considering that, according to Fr McClement: "The wife and three children are living on her father's pension of £80 per annum."¹²⁵ Once more, Mrs. Donati displayed her gratitude by writing

... I want to lose no time in expressing through you to the kind and noble foundress of the College [Lady Strickland] all my gratitude for her spontaneous and most generous act which touched me very much. I do not blush in accepting it: I accept it with pride, as homage paid to the memory of a man so worthy but so unfortunate.¹²⁶

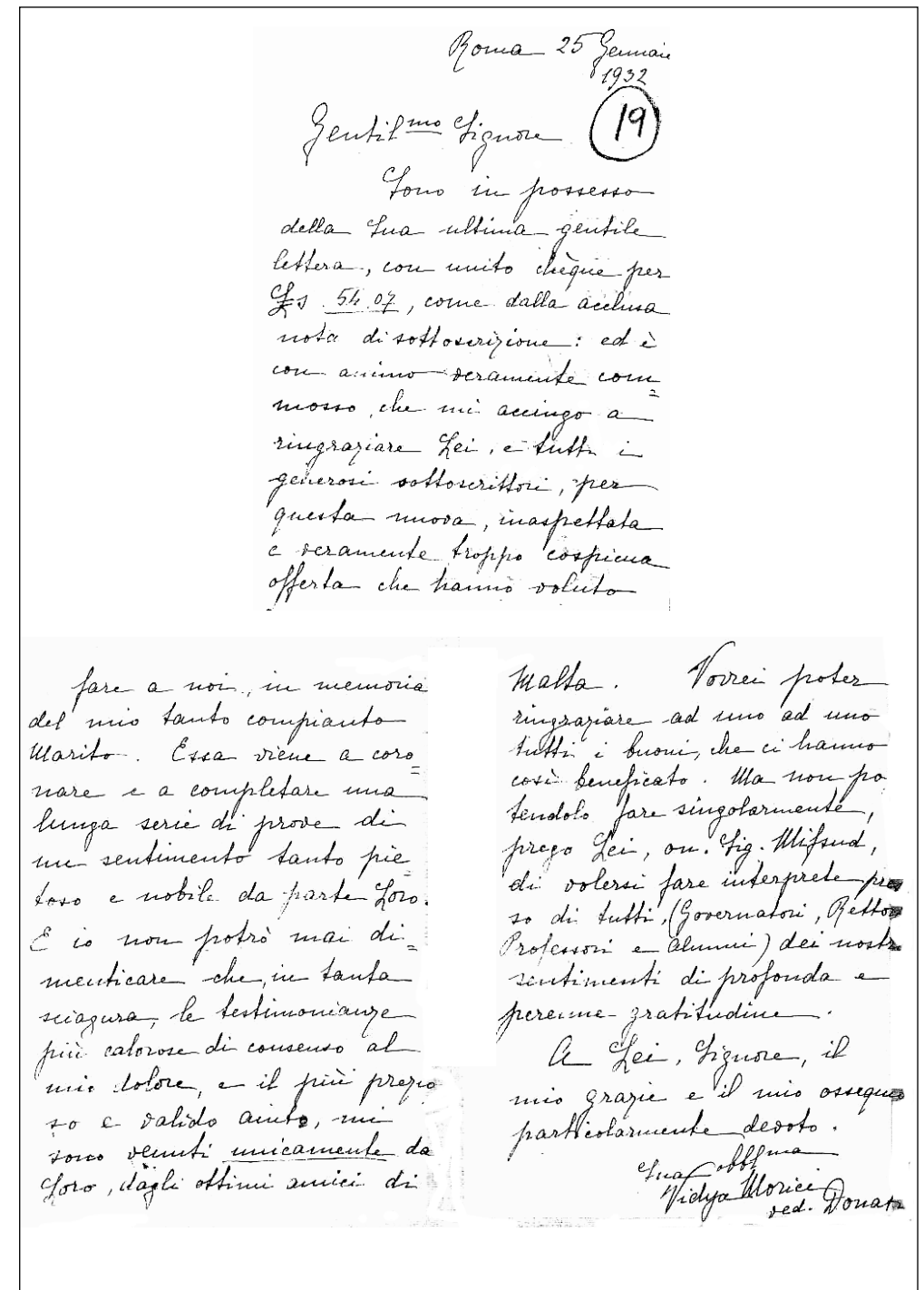
The donation collected through the initiative of Edward Mifsud was a source of speculation by the fascist authorities in Rome. They blamed Herbert Kiesler, known by Donati as 'the messenger of Maltese anti-fascists.' When Viyda Donati settled down for after the first shock, she checked with Stragliati about her husband's wishes of how to dispose of Donati's belongings in Malta. Stragliati, in acknowledging gratitude for the assistance bestowed on Mrs. Donati, wrote: "I shall never forget that in the midst of so much misfortune, the real proofs of pity came solely from them, *the good friends in Malta.*"¹²⁷

As already noted, the subscription by the teachers and parents amounted to fifty pounds and seven pence and reached the widow by 25 January 1932. In addition, 'a letter of condolence was sent to the widow and a very charming letter of sympathy, signed by a number of boys, was despatched to the three surviving children.'¹²⁸

McClement was moved with the loss his master of Italian. He wrote a letter in Italian to the widow expressing his condolences. He tried to comfort her by letting her know that he had celebrated several Masses for his repose. The Rector repeated what a saintly person her husband was. He went on by recalling the episode when Donati used to go to the College's garden to pick flowers to place them in front of the picture of his son in his room.¹²⁹

The memory of the affectionate Italian master was not easily forgotten by the pupils, staff and principals of the College. A requiem Mass was sung at St. Patrick Church during the summer holidays on Monday 31 August 1931 by the Reverend W. Harrod at the insistence of the parents, a mass that many boys attended. A second requiem Mass for his repose, sung this time at the request of friends, was celebrated by the Reverend Father Pantaleresco at St. Catherine's, Valletta. Many parents and boys together with the staff who had returned to Malta after holidays were present.¹³⁰

A marble tablet was erected on 4 March 1932 at the sacristy of the college's chapel. In the past, it was usual to have commemorative tablets erected in



Viyda Donati's letter thanking Edward R. Mifsud for the generous silver collection.

churches, but later, these were expressly forbidden by the Church by-laws except in the case of prelates. However, it was felt imperative that a memorial visible by the faithful was appropriate and the sacristy was considered a good alternative. A prayer was implored for his repose. It read:

Of your charity
pray for the repose of the soul of
Joseph Donati, LL.D., (Flor.)
Master of Italian in this College
Who died in Paris 16th August 1931
Aged 42 years
R.I.P.
Exultet iam angelica turba caelorum

The commemorative inscription did not survive the years as that part of the College was destroyed during the Second World War. A new chapel was housed on the college grounds, while the old chapel now houses the Library.

A lot of ink has been used on the merits of Donati and his one man war against the fascist state. Still, it took more than twenty years for the Italian Republic to demonstrate a pecuniary gesture to his widow. Vidya Morici Donati was awarded a pension retroactively from 1 July 1954 on the initiative of several parliamentarians including Giulio Andreotti, Arnaldo Fabriani his friend in Malta, and his colleague at *Il Popolo*, Igino Giordani. The draft law was discussed in the appropriate *Commissione Finanze e Tesoro*, and final approval was materialized after two years of the initiation of the motion.¹³¹

In all probability, there are no Donati's students still alive. In Malta, his memory has been kept alive in Herbert Ganado's *Rajt Malta Tinbidel* and some brief published accounts of some pupils. The last depositary of the memory of such an idealist, his daughter Suor Severa, died at the venerable age of 91 years on 1 April 2013. Still, several letters Donati wrote to the family never reached their intended destination because they were seized and censored by the fascist police.¹³²

Notes

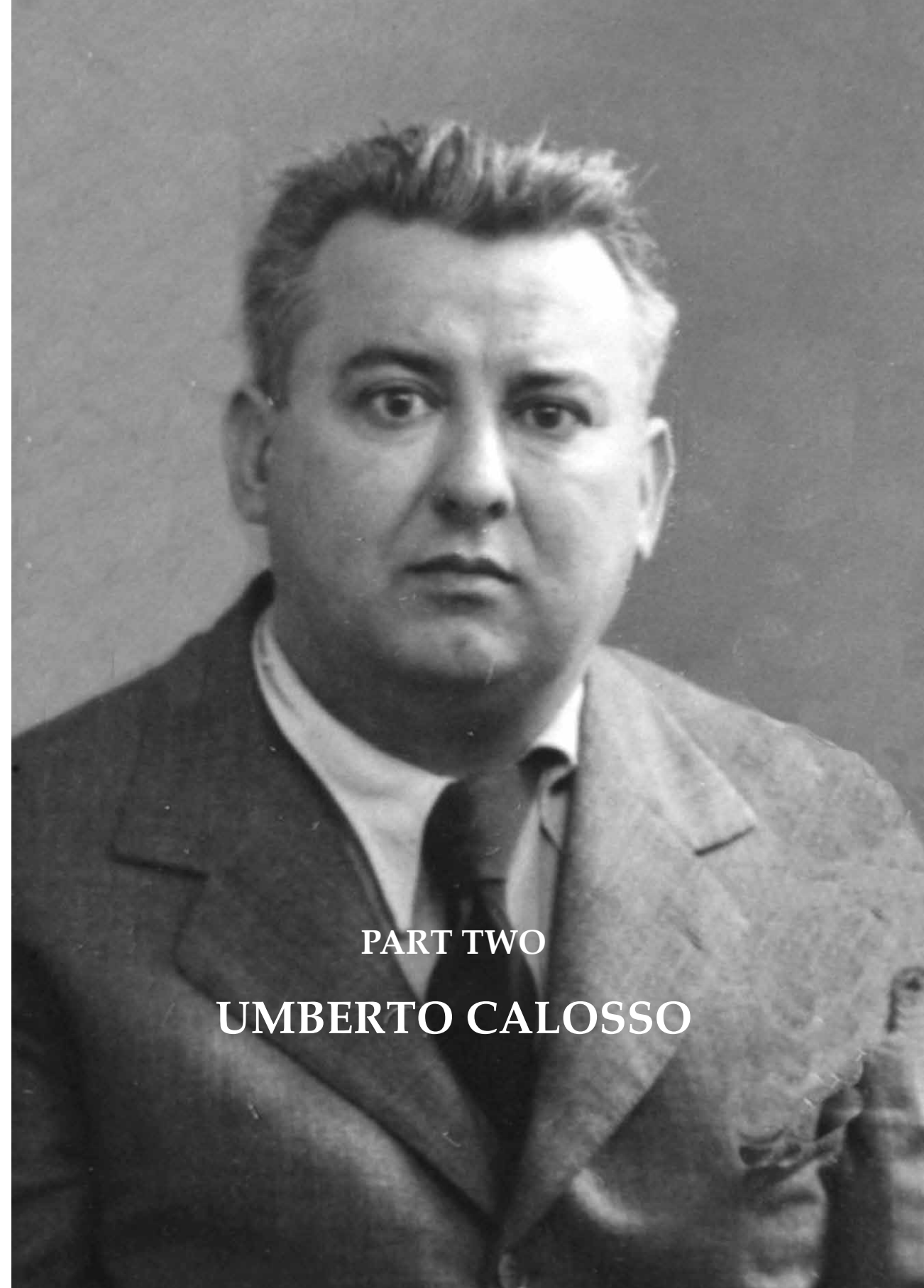
- 1 Re Angelo Crespi, see *Selected Biographical Notes*
- 2 Adriano Colocci, preface in Antonio Cini, *Origine e progresso della lingua italiana in Malta*, Giuseppe Russo, Catania, 1903.
- 3 Present site of *Azzjoni Kattolika* (Catholic Action Movement).
- 4 N[atational] A[rchives] M[alta], D[espateshes] to S[ecretary of State for the] C[olonies],

- Report on *Italian Schools at Casal Paola and Senglea*, attached to David Campbell to Philip Cunliffe-Lister, 6 October 1932.
- 5 Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism*, Berg, Oxford, 2003, 27.
- 6 Benedetta Garzarelli, 'Fascismo e propaganda all'estero: Le origini della Direzione generale per la propaganda (1933-1934),' in *Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Studi Storici*, Anno 43, No. 2 (April - June 2002), 477.
- 7 *Daily Malta Chronicle*, 17 September 1928.
- 8 *New Zealand Tablet*, Volume XXV, Issue 23, 8 October 1897, 15.
- 9 NAM, M[altese] I[mperial] G[overnment], 159/1928, Gerald Strickland to V. Hornyold 13 February 1928.
- 10 *Ibid: Memo on the establishment of an English College for boys*, Augustus Bartolo, 10 March 1928 and *Further memorandum on the establishment of an English College for boys*, Augustus Bartolo, 15 May 1928.
- 11 *Ibid: T.A.V. Best to Odo Russell*, 25 October 1928.
- 12 Maurice Micallef Eynaud, *The Thirties: Genesis and Inception* in, *St. Edward's College: Memoirs of the First Seventy-Five Years* edited and compiled by Martin Scicluna, St. Edward's College-Strickland Foundation, 2004, 5-7.
- 13 *Scritti inediti vol 2 1924-1940*, Luigi Sturzo, Franco Rizzi (Ed.), Cinque lune, Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Roma, 1975, 193.
- 14 Livio Zeno, *Il Conte Sforza*, La Monnier, Firenze, 1999, 57.
- 15 Pietro Ardizzone, *Lotte per l'egemonia culturale e politica a Malta: aspetti linguistici ed istituzionali*, IntraText Digital Library, Roma, 1995, 36. viewed 12 April 2011.
- 16 Vittorio Cervone, *Giuseppe Donati: scritti inediti e familiari*, Società Editrice Napoletana, Napoli, 1983; McClement to Donati, 21 August 1930, 59.
- 17 *Ibid.*, Donati to McClement to Donati, 24 August 1930, 62.
- 18 ASDE, Affari politici, serie 1919-1930, Gran Bretagna, busta 1211 (anno 1930). Lettera di A. Chiavolini al capo di gabinetto del Ministero Affari Esteri, Pellegrino Ghigi, 18 November 1930, non classificata, 34.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Angelo Crespi, 'Great Britain, Italy and Malta: The Voice of an Italian Exile,' *Daily Malta Chronicle*, 17 May 1930.
- 21 Franco Rizzi, 294.
- 22 *St. Edward's College Magazine*, volume I, Michaelmas Term 1929, no. 1, 14.
- 23 *Ibid*
- 24 *Ibid*
- 25 54 Strait Street Valletta. At the time of writing, it houses Palazzo Preca restaurant.
- 26 Angiulli and De Antonellis, 96.
- 27 Cervone, 54, 22 October 1930.
- 28 *Ibid*, 54, 11 November 1930.
- 29 Re Mario Bergamo, see *Selected Biographical Notes*.
- 30 Sauro Mattarelli and Paola Morigi, 'Appunti sui rapporti tra Donati, Bergamo e Berneri' in Roberto Ruffilli and Pietro Scoppola (Eds.), *Giuseppe Donati tra impegno politico e problema religioso*, Università Cattolica, Milano 1983, 206.
- 31 *Ibid*, 54, 21 October 1930
- 32 Benelli (1981), 22.
- 33 Ferrari, *ibid* 347.
- 34 Cervone, 13, 30 September 1930.
- 35 Re Monsignor Mario Sturzo. see *Selected Biographical Notes*.
- 36 Benelli, 33.

- 37 Benelli: *Lettera a Sturzo* 27 October 1930, 29.
- 38 *Organizzazione per la Vigilanza e la Repressione dell' Antifascismo* (OVRA; Italian "Organization for Vigilance and Repression of Anti-Fascism") was the secret police of the Kingdom of Italy founded in 1927 under Benito Mussolini.
- 39 Eric Shepherd, *Malta and Me*, Selwyn and Blout, London, 1926, 72. Re Eric Shepherd see Giovanni Bonello *Malta and me, Ninety years later*, Sunday Times of Malta, 14, 21, 28 September 2014.
- 40 Cardinal Pacelli, the future Pope Pius VII, was at the time the Secretary of State of the Vatican.
- 41 Re Francesco Crispi, see *Selected Biographical Notes*
- 42 David Niven, *The Moon's a Balloon*, Coronet Books, Hodder and Stoughton, London, twenty second impression, 1975, 71
- 43 Luigi Barzini, Jr. *The Italians*, Bantam Book, New York, fourteenth printing, July 1972, 53.
- 44 Benelli, 57. (Letter addressed to Ferrari, but not sent)
- 45 Giovanni Grasso, *Luigi Sturzo e i Rosselli tra Londra, Parigi e New York: carteggio, 1929-1945*, Robbettino Editore, 2003, 6.
- 46 Angiulli and De Antonellis, 96
- 47 *The Knight*, Vol. IV no 2 February 1954, Dom Mintoff, *Italy or Britain*, Back Cover
- 48 Benelli, *Lettera a Sturzo* 4 March 1931, 44.
- 49 Benelli, 44-45.
- 50 Benelli, 44.
- 51 Benelli, 45.
- 52 Cervoni, 127, *Lettera dalla moglie Vidya*: 13 December 1930, 127.
- 53 Benelli, *Lettera alla moglie Vidya*, 28 May 1931, 105.
- 54 NAM, 314/1940, Umberto Calosso to J.A.C Cruikshank, 2 April 1940. For complete text see 'Appendix 3'.
- 55 Cervone, Introduzione, xxvi.
- 56 Benelli, *Lettera a Sturzo*: 31 March 1931, 46.
- 57 Benelli, 47.
- 58 Benelli, *Lettera alla moglie Vidya* 9 March 1931, 85.
- 59 Nöl Riley Titch, *Literary Cafés*, Starrhill Press, Philadelphia, 1989, 11.
- 60 Michael Refalo, *My Century*, translation of Herbert Ganado's *Rajt Malta Tinbidel*, Vol. 3, Be Communications, Malta, 2006, 154.
- 61 Micallef Eynaud, *ibid.*
- 62 Refalo 3, (2006), 153.
- 63 *ibid.*
- 64 *ibid.*
- 65 Ardizzone, 44
- 66 See also: Max Farrugia, *L-internament u l-eñilju*, PIN, Malta, 2007, 186, 694.
- 67 Aldo Farini, *Fiabe Tradizioni e leggende maltesi*, Tipografia Casa S. Giuseppe, Hamrun, Malta, 1934-1936. See also Äorä Mifsud-Chircop, 'It-Testi ta' Aldo Farini – Nbalji u Mhux Polemiki' (Aldo Farini's Texts – Mistakes and No Polemics) *Il-Mument*, 12 February 1999.
- 68 Guido de Marco, *The Politics of Persuasion*, Progress Press, Malta, 2007, 6.
- 69 Malcom J. Naudi, *Random Recollections and Memories 1914-2002*, The Farsons Foundation, Malta, 2010, 30.
- 70 Parliamentary Reports, Official Report Volume 10 Second Parliament of Malta, Legislative Assembly, Session 1924-27, Third Part, Government Printing Press, Malta, 1928, 2985-86.
- 71 NAM, Deportation Order by David Campbell, 20 January 1936.
- 72 NAM, Giovanni Calabritto to Commissioner of Police, 22 January 1936.

- 73 *Times of Malta*, 14 June 1940.
- 74 Fondazione Ugo Spirito e Renzo de Felice, Roma, Carteggio Biscottini, Ercole to Dino Grandi, 6 July 1940.
- 75 *Ibid.*
- 76 Naudi, *ibid.*
- 77 Stephanie Vella, *Vincenzo Bonello as Pioneer in Maltese Art History*, unpublished dissertation, B.A. Hons., History of Art Department, University of Malta, 1978.
- 78 NAM, 112/40, Edward R. Mifsud to Edward St. John Jackson, 7 February 1942.
- 79 Camillo Bonanno, *Malta, Sessanta anni dopo*, Roma, 1990, unpublished manuscript, 43.
- 80 Carlo de Rysky, *Croce e Spade*, Editore P. De Gornari, Genova, 1934.
- 81 ASDE, Affari Politici serie 1934-45, Gran Bretagna Busta 2 (Donati). Rapporto riservato del Console Silenzi al Ministro degli Esteri, 28 aprile 1938.
- 82 Ardizzone, 43.
- 83 Re Annibale Scicluna Sorge, see: *Selected Biographical Notes*
- 84 Ruffilli and Scoppola, 265.
- 85 Michael Refalo 3, 153.
- 86 Henry Frendo, *Nerik Mizzi, The Formative Years*, Malta University History Society, 2009, 11.
- 87 A[rchivio] S[torico] D[iplomatico] E[steri], Affari politici serie politici 1931-45 – Gran Bretagna busta 2 (anno 1931), fascicolo 6 (Donati) quoted by Pietro Ardizzone, 36.
- 88 Cervone, 198.
- 89 *Malta*, 'La questione linguistica e la realtà,' 28 April 1931.
- 90 Ruffilli and Scoppola, 271. See also: Barbara Spackman *Fascist virilities: rhetoric, ideology and social fantasy in Italy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 1996.
- 91 *Malta*, 22 May 1932 'Fandonie Stricklandiane'.
- 92 See appendix: Titles of Giuseppe Donati's front page articles printed in *Malta*.
- 93 *Malta*, 22 May 1932 'Fandonie Stricklandiane'.
- 94 ASDE, *ibid.*
- 95 *Malta*, 'La questione linguistica e la realtà,' 28 April 1931.
- 96 *Malta*, 'Ad un baro della storia,' 30 April 1931.
- 97 Augusto Bartolo, *History of the Maltese Islands in Malta and Gibraltar*, Allister Macmillan (Ed.) W.H. & L. Collingridge, London, 1915, 53.
- 98 *Malta*, 'Malta, il Mediterraneo, l'Impero, l'Italia,' 2 May 1931.
- 99 *Malta*, 'Malta ai Maltesi e la Questione linguistica,' 7 May 1931
- 100 Geoffrey Hull, *The Malta Language Question – a case study of cultural imperialism*, Said, Malta, 1993, 183.
- 101 Claudia Baldoli, The 'Northern Denominator' and the Mare Nostrum: Fascist Italy's 'Cultural War' in Malta, *Modern Italy*, Volume, No 1. February 2008, 13.
- 102 Annibale Scicluna Sorge (Ed.) *In difesa della civiltà Italiana a Malta*, Giusti, Livorno, 1931.
- 103 Luigi Preti, *Gl'inglesi a Malta*, Bocca, Milano, 1938.
- 104 *Giovinezza, Giovinezza*, which was published by Mondadori of Milano in 1964 was translated by Isabel Quingly with the title *Through the Fascist Fire* and published by Secker & Warburg of London in 1968.
- 105 Mario Buhagiar, *The early Christian Remains at Tas-Silä and San Pawl, Milqi, Malta a reconsideration of the archaeological evidence*, Melita Historica, Vol II (1996), 1-41.
- 106 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, third edition, 2003, 209.
- 107 Steven Morewood, *The British defence of Egypt, 1935-1940: conflict and crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean.*, Routledge, London, 2004, 151.
- 108 Nicola Malizia, *Inferno su Malta*, Mursia, Milano, 1976. 21.
- 109 Ezio Maria Gray, *Le terre nostre ritornano ... Malta, Corsica, Nizza*, Istituto Geografico De

- Agostini, Novara, 1940, 19.
- 110 Savelli, 534.
- 111 Angiulli and De Antonellis, 100
- 112 Benelli, Giuseppe Donati to his wife Vidya 13 June 1931, 111
- 113 Adone Zoli, *Ricordo di Giuseppe Donati* in Guglielmo Quadrotta, *Democrazia Cristiana Italiana*. Libreria Editrice Romana, Roma, 1959, 133.
- 114 Benelli, Giuseppe Donati to Vidya Donati, 14 July 1931, 115.
- 115 Benelli, Giuseppe Donati to Vidya Donati, 20 July 1931, 117.
- 116 Giovanni Grasso, *Ibid.*
- 117 Benelli, Giuseppe Stragliati a Vidya Donati, 21 August 1931, 119.
- 118 NAM, Secretary Board of Governors, St. Edward College, 18/1931, Vidya Donati Morici to Arnaldo Fabriani, undated but written one week after her husband's death.
- 119 NAM, 18/1931, Mc Clement to Edward Mifsud, 9 September 1931.
- 120 Julie A. Carlson, *England's First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstone, William Godwin, Mary Shelley*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2007, 145.
- 121 Mimmo Franzinelli, *I tentacoli dell'OVRA. Agenti, collaboratori e vittime della polizia politica fascista*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 1999, 145.
- 122 NAM, *ibid.*, Lady Strickland to Edward Mifsud, 16 September 1931.
- 123 *Ibid.* Edward Mifsud to Lady Strickland, 25 September 1931
- 124 *Ibid.* Vidya Donati Morici to Arnaldo Fabriani, 2 October 15 1931
- 125 *Ibid.* McClement to Edward Mifsud 9 September 1931.
- 126 *Ibid.* Vidya Donati Morici to Edward R. Mifsud, 4 November 1931
- 127 *Ibid.* Letter by Vidya Donati Morici: 25 January 1932
- 128 *St. Edward's College Magazine*, volume I Summer Term 1931, 11.
- 129 Cervone, 31-32.
- 130 *Ibid.*
- 131 *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, Legislatura II, Documenti, Disegni di Legge e Relazioni, Proposta di Legge n. 1077*, 28 July 1954, 1-2.
- 132 Author's Archives, Severa Donati to Giorgio Peresso, 1 July 2010.



PART TWO
 UMBERTO CALOSSO

CHAPTER 3

Another anti-fascist in Malta: Umberto Calosso

The history of the Maltese islands has periodically been enriched by émigrés who made Malta known to the outside world mostly through correspondence exchanged with colleagues located in various parts of the globe. This was the case of the array of exiles who briefly settled in Malta during the *Risorgimento*, the most famous being Francesco Crispi. Luigi Pirandello came only through the vision of the recollections of his mother, the daughter of the Sicilian patriot Giovanni Ricci Grammitto. The anarchist Errico Malatesta ran away in May 1899 from his imprisonment in Lampedusa to join his Sicilian colleague in Malta, Francesco Saverio Merlino, before ending up in London.

The fascist takeover in Italy did not result in any significant influx of anti-fascist émigrés, with the exception of the nine months of Donati's stay in Malta. Donati contributed to a small degree towards the Cultural and Education field in Malta but, for all intents and purposes, his anti-fascist militancy ceased the moment he reached Malta, mainly due to ill health.

Umberto Calosso was destined to follow Donati to Malta. However, while Donati had been forced to leave Italy against his will, Calosso was not because, although they shared similar ideals and sometimes even the same mentors such as Salvemini, their only intellectual connection was through their employment at St. Edward College. Their respective assignments at Malta helped in the conservation of Italian culture free from local connotations. Due to a much longer stay than Donati, Calosso left an imprint on the educational field. While at Malta, he devoted his free time actively contributing to the

anti-fascist campaign through writing, thus leaving a trail during his sojourn in the island as well as after his departure.

Rebel with a cause

Umberto Matteo Carlo Calosso was born in the village of Belveglio d'Asti on 23 September 1895.¹ The village is 5.35 square kilometres (roughly the surface area of Ħabbar, Malta). His father Giuseppe was an army officer while his mother, Giuseppina Damasio, was a teacher in their own village school. He attended high school in Alessandria and, in 1906, moved to the *Convitto Nazionale Umberto Primo* in downtown Turin. After attaining matriculation in 1913, he enrolled in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Turin. At some point in the interlude of Italy's neutrality (1914-15) during World War I, in the vein of the feelings of the majority of university students, he supported the nationalist movement backing Italy's intervention in the European conflict. In fact, he volunteered for combat in the front line in spite of his incapacity for military service due to a defect in his leg since birth. At the end of the war, he was demobilized as an officer of the *Real Esercito Italiano*. He then resumed his university studies as well as his contacts with the socialist and cultural world in Turin. One of Italy's leading historians of



Antonio Gramsci



Palmiro Togliatti

Italian journalism, Mario Grandinetti, followed the first stages of Calosso's career. Calosso came to know the young liberal Piero Gobetti who invited him to collaborate in his new review *Energie Nuove*. While Calosso did not write in this paper, he participated within the new cultural and political initiatives that were sprouting in Turin after the end of the First World War. Indeed, on 9 August 1919, the weekly *Ordine Nuovo*, founded by Antonio Gramsci, published a letter by a student - the one time young fiery nationalist, war volunteer Umberto Calosso - addressed to the communist activist Palmiro Togliatti lauding communist beliefs.

Like everybody else, the carnage of the war that had just ended left an indelible scar on Calosso. He was especially stricken with the death on the battlefield of the young genius poet-friend, Mario Tancredi Rossi. Later on in life, he recalled the sad experiences of four years of war, the result of which had eradicated not just a feeling but the very facet of every emotion.² Between the years 1919 and in 1920, he delved into research that culminated in the writing of his thesis which became his visiting card for the rest of his life. He graduated in liberal arts in 1920 with a dissertation about the anarchy of Vittorio Alfieri. He was so engrossed with this character that he decided to share it with the general public, naming it *L'anarchia di Vittorio Alfieri*. The book was published by Giuseppe Laterza of Bari in 1924. The literary critic Natalino Sapegno viewed the book to be a reflection of his thoughts resulting from all the sources of the books he had studied.³ Sapegno elucidated the definition of Alfieri's *anarchia* as distinct from any paradigm of a theory but as an expression contrary to any configuration of ideology. Calosso was obsessed with Alfieri's quest to search for Italian roots and a libertarian consciousness.⁴

The value of this literary work has to be seen and understood in context of the extraordinary intellectual vitality of Turin at that particular epoch. The Piedmontese capital was surrounded by a harsh political climate aggrieved with the aftermath of a great war. Turin was not just the industrial capital of a relatively newly-unified state, but

'the most vigorous centre of the gathering left by the intellectual energies which remained linked to the old and not so old patrimony of democratic liberties.'⁵

Amongst the encyclopaedic collection of valid thinkers that the city created, Piero Gobetti, Antonio Gramsci and Umberto Calosso were on the front line. The last two were students of two celebrated liberal philosophers, Luigi Einaudi and Benedetto Croce. Gobetti was the intellectual with whom

both Donati and Calosso shared a connection. While Donati was Catholic in outlook, Gobetti was lay. But Gobetti, being Piedmontese, was much closer to Calosso. Gobetti asserted that the problems of society were caused by the cultural backwardness of the Italians. In his view, Italians held the conception of the state as distributor of privileges or, as Errico Malatesta put it, 'the state is nothing except an organized oppression favouring a privileged minority.'⁶ The average Italian looked at his country with a cynical approach rather than in a civic sense. This condition led to the spread of corruption resulting from the equation of democracy with demagoguery. Corruption in Italy was rife and the governments were the prisoners of a bureaucracy which was tied to a new class of the state's profiteers. Luigi Sturzo maintained that 'the hope of freeing itself from that bureaucracy was remote without decisive action.'⁷ A past president of the Italian Republic, Giuseppe Saragat, remembered vividly his first encounter with Gobetti at a small café in *Via Po* in Torino in 1922 on the eve of the fascist march on Rome. Gobetti, already the editor of *Rivoluzione liberale*, was surrounded by a handful of intellectuals such as

March on Rome



Augusto Monti, Manlio Brosio (a future Secretary-General of NATO), Filippo Burzio, Alessandro Passerin D'Entrèves and Umberto Calosso, - in the Torino which Saragat recorded as being the antithesis of fascism.⁸

Calosso's anti-fascist flaming credentials preceded Mussolini's seizure of power. His early connection with Antonio Gramsci when young brought him in a series of courageous and dramatic exploits with some hilarious facets. One such illustration was when Gramsci sent him on a journalistic assignment in Novara during the summer of 1922 - a few months before the fascist march on Rome. Following the violent confrontation between fascist and socialist factions subsequent to the burning of the *Camera del Lavoro*, Gramsci sent one of his closest collaborators, Felice Platone (one of the founders of the Communist Party) to report the disturbances. Platone phoned the offices of the *Ordine Nuovo* his eye witness account of the incidents. However, Platone was compelled to abandon his mission after he was caught and savagely beaten by the black shirts. Calosso pleaded with Antonio Gramsci to volunteer to replace Platone in this difficult task. Pia Carena Leonetti, the executive secretary of Gramsci's paper and the author who reproduced the Novara episode, described Calosso as 'tall, strong, cheerful and full of life as well as trained to military ruses of war.'⁹ On reaching the scene, he initially followed the same pattern of reporting used by Platone. Since this route proved to be risky he stopped the transmission of his report by telephone. He found a railway employee willing to act as his courier who would deliver an envelope to the paper's office in Turin with the report of the grave clashes. The fascist bands were baffled in reading the news update, so very factual in detail. They wandered around the city to chase the mysterious reporter. Concurrently, Calosso had found a masterful way, which he considered a safe but nevertheless recklessly risky technique to secure the source needed for transmitting his despatches. He joined the fascist crowd rambling in the town to uncover the specter which dared to snub the *fascio*. He continued with this bravado until the unrest settled down. From this date onwards, facing danger became his passport.

Gramsci himself was a living, albeit imprisoned, bibliographical dictionary as afterwards evidenced by his *magnum opus: Quaderni dal carcere*, his annotations while in prison. No subject, literal or political figure, was left out in this magnificent collage of history. Even Malta was included. Antonio Gramsci felt that the signing of the concordat complicated the defence of *italianità* in Malta.¹⁰ In this book, he also commented on the relationship between Enrico Mizzi, future leader of Nationalist Party, and Luigi Federzoni, one of the founders of the Italian Nationalist Party.

An antifascista di prima ora

Calosso was arrested on the day of the fascist March on Rome (28 October 1922) while he was staying at the building housing the trade unions in Turin. He faced trial and was charged for armed resistance to the fascist gangs who had besieged the building.¹¹ Following the fascist seizure of power in 1922, the Gramsci connection earned Calosso the appellation of communist – with all the consequences it entailed. In the spring of 1923, Gramsci's *Ordine Nuovo* was suppressed by the authorities. All the members of the editorial staff were arrested and brought before the courts accused of sedition. During the trial, Benedetto Croce went to Turin and appeared as character witness for Umberto Calosso. At that time, the Courts were still relatively independent of the fascist regime and therefore still able to resist government pressure. Moreover, the prestige of Croce's presence saved the day for his young student who avoided jail and was set free. He was thus able to continue his academic career and, conversely, his anti-fascist activity. Croce showed his courage on other occasions as well. In February 1923, he published a public letter in favour of Piero Gobetti when the young publisher – the most intransigent of Mussolini's opponents – was arrested for alleged violations of the press law.

After obtaining a University degree, Calosso sought employment as near to his home as possible so that he could continue his political activity. At first, he did not succeed in obtaining any of the two. With his reputation somewhat stained in the eyes of the regime, Calosso needed a sponsor to plead on his behalf. Once more, his university professor came to Calosso's aid. He participated in a contest for a faculty of arts post in Italian and Latin literature. Unsurprisingly, he was not chosen. Croce wrote to his colleague, fellow philosopher and the Minister of Education Giovanni Gentile, appealing for the consideration of his student's request. Gentile did not beat behind the bush. He told Croce that his protégé was known to be rebellious and, therefore, was penalized accordingly.¹² However, he made it to a technical college way down in Messina, a thousand kilometres away from home. So Calosso settled in Messina from 1 October 1924 until he resettled at Alessandria two years later. In Sicily, he was known for his acquaintance with the Communist lawyer¹³ Dr. Cosentino and was consequently said to be engaging in anti-national propaganda. Calosso's name was known to the Italian police as he was incorrectly perceived to be a communist subversive while practicing his profession of teacher at Messina in 1921. On the other hand, the Ministero dell'Interno, while taking some time to pronounce itself, thought it fit to change the appellation from Communist to Socialist.¹⁴



Oreste Lajola



Ettore Lajola

Socialist or Communist, he certainly had nothing in common with fascist ideology. Back to Piedmont, he started teaching at the *Real Istituto Tecnico Superiore Leonardo da Vinci*, where he taught history of literature and philosophy. Although the police records showed that he professed openly hostile views against the regime, his political activity became somewhat subdued. He was forced to distance himself from Gobetti who, by the end of 1925, virtually excluded himself from active politics. The regime increased its harassment on Gobetti and, on 5 September 1925, he was beaten by fascist bullies on the doorsteps of his house in Turin.¹⁵ He escaped to Paris where he died in February 1926. The way the regime dealt with Gobetti showed in no uncertain manner what would be the consequences for anyone who dared oppose publicly the fascist regime.

During his teaching assignment in Alessandria, Calosso stood aloof from any open political activity. Hence he was compelled to operate clandestinely. Still he was not trusted. Nevertheless, he had accepted to sign a declaration of loyalty towards the Italian fascist state so as not to jeopardize the chances of obtaining a job outside Italy sponsored by the Government. Subsequently, he was disqualified in a contest intended for the employment of teachers abroad. The reason given was that his academic profile was not satisfactory enough. In 1931, he was severely reprimanded by the Ministry for his method

of teaching which was considered contrary to the prescribed norms imposed by the government

The Belveglio idealist married Clelia Lajolo at the parrocchia di Crocetta in Turin on 15 February 1927. She hailed from Vinchio, also a province of Asti, and was the daughter of Giovanni Battista, an army officer. She was the sister of Oreste and Ettore, who had both died heroically during the First World War. Oreste (1894-1916), a Lieutenant of the Fourth Regiment *Genova Cavalleria*, was shot dead by the Austrians while dismounting from his horse. He was awarded posthumously the bronze medal for military valour. A year later, his brother Ettore, captain of Fourth Regiment *Genova Cavalleria*, was in command of his squadron at Pozzuolo del Friuli on 30 October 1917 during the Caporetto campaign. Since the enemy was advancing without meeting resistance from the Italian forces, he was ordered to retreat. In spite of the order, he mounted his horse and commanded his subordinates to advance against the Austrians. In this gallant stance, he met a sure death. He was awarded the gold medal for military valour.

The narration of this episode became part of Calosso's curriculum throughout his life. It became a sort of character reference when he sought suitable recognition for his eventual links with his British protégées. He boasted about the streets named for his heroes in Asti and Torino and schools (Scuola Elementare San Carlo d'Asti). When later on while in Malta Calosso had a dispute with the representatives of Italian institutions in Malta, he protested to the Governor of Malta David Campbell. The Governor took serious consideration of what Calosso protested about. In turn, he repeated the nature of his complaint and, to reinforce the legitimacy of his protégé's claim, he enlightened the Secretary of State for the Colonies Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister with the Captain Ettore Lajolo's episode. Campbell added to the Lajolo's bravery: he had won the rarely bestowed Italian Gold Medal for Military Valour.¹⁶

The scholarly clique circling Piero Gobetti in the small café at Via Po was increasingly being dwarfed out of existence. Gobetti died in 1926; Gramsci died in prison in 1937; Nenni and Saragat fled to France and Austria respectively; Augusto Monti, who had succeeded Gobetti as the motivator of what was left of the latter's publishing arm, avoided harassment from the regime for some time but was finally imprisoned for three years in 1935. Alessandro Passerin D'Entrèves was the only one of the group who steered away from persecution as he concentrated on a purely academic life at the University of Torino. So did Manlio Brosio while Filippo Burzio only escaped imprisonment by becoming a fugitive. Being a valid

intellectual, Calosso had to possess a lot of courage. He had to be critical of the conformist society surrounding him based on rigid and intransigent structures such as fascism. As an intellectual, it was difficult to separate politics from culture and vice-versa. A politician who had no cultural vision of what surrounded him was not a capable politician. Inversely, the intellectual who isolated himself from the political context was an abysmal intellectual.¹⁷ The choice was the position between the two poles. Calosso, like some of his fellow intellectuals, had to choose on whether to spend a passive (or worse submissive) academic life or else express his liberal views to a small audience of friends. The only other choice, except for a continuous dreary soliloquy, was voluntary exile.

Notes

- 1 Atti di battesimo no 23, copy provided to the author by Don Aldo Rosso, Parrocchia, Navività di Maria, Belveglio d'Asti, 9 February 2009.
- 2 Mario Grandinetti, 'Umberto: giornalista dell'Ordine Nuovo' in *Umberto Calosso antifascista e socialista: atti del convegno storico-commemorativo di Asti, 13-14 ottobre 1979* Marco Brunazzi (Ed.) Marsilio, Venezia, 1981, 81.
- 3 Natalino Sapegno, 'Calosso lettore di Alfieri e Manzoni' in *Umberto Calosso antifascista e socialista: atti del convegno storico-commemorativo di Asti, 13-14 ottobre 1979* Marco Brunazzi (Ed.) Marsilio, Venezia, 1981, 53.
- 4 Peter Bondanella and Julia Conaway, (Eds), *The Macmillan Dictionary of Italian Literature*, Macmillan's Press, London, 1979, 8.
- 5 Ugo Facco De Lagarda, *Cronistoria dei fatti d'Italia (1900-1950)* Volume II, Parte Terza 1930-1939, Pan Editrice, Milano, 1975, 145.
- 6 Alfio Bernabei, *Esuli ed Emigranti nel Regno Unito 1920-1940*, Mursia, Venezia, 1997, 40.
- 7 Luigi Sturzo, *I discorsi di Luigi Sturzo*, Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Roma, 1951, 75. Speech at Augusteo Roma, 2 May 1921.
- 8 Giovanni Spadolini, *Il mio debito con Gobetti (1948-1981)*, Gobetti. Saragat e la vecchia Torino, Le Monnier, 1981, 45.
- 9 Pia Carena Leonetti, *Una donna del nostro tempo*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1969, 139-141.
- 10 Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, vol I, Einaudi, Torino, 1975, 1003.
- 11 Fabio Fernando Rizi, *Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism*, University of Toronto Press, 2003, 144.
- 12 C[entro] S[tudi] P[iero] G[obetti], Fondo Umberto Calosso, Torino, scatola 19-21, Croce to Gentile, 8 April 1924.
- 13 A[rchivio] C[entrale dello] S[tato], Roma (collocazione: Ministero Interno, Casellario Politico Centrale, Busta 958, fascicolo 6456, Prefetto di Alessandria to Ministero dell'Interno, 4 July 1933, ref. 9154..
The information, originating from the Archivio Centrale dello Stato cited from this point onwards, was kindly passed on to the author by Professor Piero Ardizzone.
- 14 *ibid* to Ministero dell'Interno to Prefetto di Alessandria, 16 June 1934, n. 36127/645.
- 15 Piero Gobetti lived with his wife Ada Prospero at 6 via Antonio Fabro Torino. Piero Gobetti was born in Turin on 19 June 1901. He met his future wife Ada at high school. That same address nowadays houses the *Centro Studi Piero Gobetti*, founded in 1961, hosting a library

about Nineteenth Century history and politics. It contains more than 65,000 books, a newspaper library of 4,400 titles and the professional Library of the philosopher Norberto Bobbio as well as the Fondo Umberto Calosso.

16 NAM, DSSC, David Campbell to Philip Cunliffe-Lister., 7 July 1933 (secret).

17 Laurana Lajolo, Saluto conclusivo in *Umberto Calosso antifascista e socialisti: atti del convegno storico-commemorativo di Asti, 13-14 ottobre 1979*, Marco Brunazzi, (Ed.), Marsilio, Venezia, 1981, 245.

CHAPTER 4

Umberto Calosso roams in Malta

The vacancy brought about by the death of Giuseppe Donati was filled by Umberto Calosso. The Rector, Father Frederick McClement, went to London during summer holidays of 1931, once more to scout for a replacement for the vacant post of master of Italian. Again, McClement's friend, Angelo Crespi, found out that the administration of St. Edward College was seeking a native speaking master of Italian. Umberto, together with his wife, happened to be in London for holidays at the juncture. Crespi arranged a meeting with the Rector at the verandah of the National Liberal Club in London where McClement offered him the vacant post at St Edward's.¹ Calosso accepted the offer without hesitation.

Becoming an exile

Calosso was so enthusiastic about the post that he came to Malta straight away without bothering to report to the college he was teaching in at Alessandria. This action attracted the immediate notice of the Italian Foreign Ministry that, on 26 September 1930, promptly requested the Education Ministry to ask Calosso to report to the *Direzione degli Italiani all'Estero* (D.I.E.) before reaching Malta. The Prefect of Alessandria soon discovered that Calosso had already arrived at Malta. Calosso had previously obtained a regular passport showing his place of birth erroneously listed as Alessandria instead of Belveglio.

The Italian Consul-General in Malta, Guglielmo Silenzi, was aware of Calosso's arrival in the island. Initially, the unilateral departure from Alessandria to teach in Malta was not considered so odious in view of his