When the city of Valletta was founded by Grand Master Jean de la Valette in 1566 the Council of the Order of St. John, fearing a fresh Turkish onslaught, desired to speed up the building of the new city. In order to encourage this, the Chapter General, held in 1569, accorded special facilities to those members of the Order who erected buildings in the town, by permitting them to dispose of their property, in Valletta, without a dispensation (1).

The growth of the city was very rapid as, from a plan of the period (2), we see that by 1600 Valletta had already assumed its present shape. The Conventual Church, the Hospital and the Auberges of the various Langues had already been built, whilst Balis, the richer knights, and the local aristocracy, vied with one another in erecting sumptuous palaces which were to make Valletta a “splendid town quite like a dream”.

One of the finest of these palaces is the Palazzo Parisio which stands at the head of Merchants Street or Strada San Giacomo as it was known during the rule of the Order (3).

The site on which the present palace stands was originally occupied by two houses, one belonging to Chev. Fra Michele Fontemere dit La Chiesa and the other to Francesco This. These were purchased by the Bali of Manosca, Comm. Fra Giovanni di Ventimiglia, of the Counts Marsellesi Orioules, of the Langue of Provence, who, in 1608, left them in usufruct to those members of his family who at any time might be serving in the Order (3).

We later find that in 1717 these two houses were given by the Ventimiglia family to Donna Maria Sceberras in exchange for two houses in Kingsway (4).

On the death of Donna Maria the houses were inherited by her son, Monsignor Domenico Sceberras, a Conventual Chaplain of the Order, and also Archdeacon of the Cathedral, Auditor to Grand Master Zondadari and Vicar General to Bishop Gori Mancini. In 1726 Monsignor Sceberras accompanied Bishop Gori to Rome in order to defend the Ecclesiastical Immunities against the pretensions of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhenza. Pope Benedict XIII was so impressed by his ability that he created him Titular Bishop of Epifania. Monsignor Sceberras demolished the two Ventimiglia houses and on the site erected the present palace with its simple but elegant architecture.

Bishop Sceberras died on 25 July 1744 at the age of 73 and was interred at ‘Ta Gesu’ Church in Valletta (5); the property then passed to his sister Donna Margherita Muscati.

It was Donna Margherita’s grand-daughter, Anna Muscati, who on 13 October 1760 married the penniless Cavalier Don Domenico Parisio of Reggio, Calabria.

The noble house of Palazzo, seeing itself beset by enormous debts and having studied how best to save itself from final ruin by contracting a wealthy marriage, had cast an eye on Anna Muscati, an heiress to a large fortune and one of the leading ladies of Valletta. Cavalier Don Domenico Parisio came over to Malta to woo her and often spoke of the large property which his family was supposed to possess, but no mention was ever made of the huge debts. In 1760, after a courtship of over two years, Donna Anna consented to marry Cavalier Domenico bringing with her a dowry of over 80,000 Maltese scudi (6).

(1) R. Malta Lib. Archives. No. 289, fol. 50r.
(2) Plan of Valletta by CHEV. FRA FRANCESCO DELL’ANTELLA 1600.
(3) Records of Notary ASCANIO SCAGLIA of 27 September 1608.
(4) Records of Notary PIETRO PAOLO NATALE of 8 July 1717.
(5) R. Malta Lib. Ms. 411.
(6) Equivalent to £6,666. Sc. 1 = 1s. 8d.
Donna Anna was persuaded by her husband that, for a short while, it was expedient for them to live with his father at Reggio until the Messina residence was got ready. On arriving at Reggio, however, the newly wedded bride saw for herself the true state of her husband's family fortune. The newly married couple suffered continuous importunities from the family creditors and at one time the bride had to pawn her own jewellery; one day Cavalier Parisio even asked his wife to return the few pieces of jewellery which he had given her as a wedding present as these had been borrowed and were being reclaimed by their rightful owners.

The damage was beyond repair as the marriage could not be dissolved, and when Donna Anna complained to her husband he excused himself by saying that even he had been unaware of the deplorable state his family had been reduced to.

The climate of Reggio seriously affected Donna Anna's health and on three occasions she was forced to return to Malta — on her third visit in 1774 she was prohibited by her physicians from returning to her husband's native land.

In February 1783 Calabria, including the city of Reggio, was scoured by a terrible earthquake. Donna Anna had then been living in Malta for eleven years and although five children were born of the marriage she had only one of them under her care, the youngest, Paolo, who had been born in Malta and of whom more will be heard anon; the other four were living with their father at Reggio. One can therefore well imagine Donna Anna's anxiety for the safety of her family.

As the galleys of the Order were being sent to succour Messina and Reggio, Donna Anna took the opportunity of sending by Chevalier Sanpris, Captain of one of the galleys, a sum of money sufficient to meet any needs. Cavalier Parisio accepted the money and sent the four children living with him to their mother who welcomed them warmly. The children, however, had no other end in view than to return to Reggio laden with money and presents. They behaved so badly to their mother and to their grandfather, the old Don Paolo Muscati, that Donna Anna made no opposition when three of them expressed the desire of returning to their father in Reggio.

On the morning of Monday, 27 October 1783, Comm. Don Giacinto Parisio, brother of Don Domenico, called at the house in Merchants Street and wanted his nephews and nieces, Giovanni, Maria, Gaetana and Francesco to return with him to Reggio immediately. Donna Anna informed him that Gaetana was ill and in no fit state to travel, but, in spite of this, Don Giacinto violently seized Gaetana and dragged her to a waiting coach. This commotion took place in the street outside the house, a crowd composed of all sorts of people having gathered surprised at such goings on. sorts of people having gathered, surprised at such goings on.

Donna Anna rushed to Grand Master de Rohan to implore his protection. The Grand Master sent for the Castellan, Commander de Neveu, and ordered him to issue a warrant of impediment of departure on two sailing vessels which were about to set sail. This warrant was to remain in force until the young Parisios decided whether they wished to remain in Malta or return to Reggio. Gaetana elected to remain in Malta and live with her mother; the sailing vessels were then allowed to proceed with the remaining three Parisios on board (7).

In 1798 we find Palazzo Parisio the property of Chev. Paolo Parisio Muscati, the youngest son of Donna Anna, who had been created a Knight of Devotion by Grand Master Ferdinand von Hompesch. It was on June 12 of that fate-

---

(7) The story of Parisio family has been taken from:—
(a) Risposta dell'Ill. Sig. D. Anna Muscati Parisio alle Ragioni dell'Ill. Sig. D. Domenico Parisio. R. Malta Lib., Misc. 453(3).
(b) From old Ms. in possession of the Mompalao de Piro family.
ful year that Malta capitulated to the French practically without a fight.

Napoleon Bonaparte landed on 13 June and took up his quarters at the Banca Giuratale in Merchants Street; but, finding this far from comfortable, on the 14th moved into Palazzo Parisio which, it is presumed, was either requisitioned or put at his disposal by Chev. Paolo. It is here that the great Napoleon resided from 14 to 20 June before proceeding to the conquest of Egypt, and it is from here that he issued the decrees which were to change the course of Maltese history.

September 2, 1798 saw the revolt of the Maltese against their new masters, and Chev. Paolo Parisio Muscati joined the insurgents and headed the Naxxar volunteers throughout the campaign which culminated in the capitulation of the French forces on September 5, 1800.

On November 26, 1800, Sir Ralph Abercrombie, commanding the expedition to Egypt, called at Malta on board H.M.S. Diadem, and like Napoleon lodged at Palazzo Parisio up to December 20 (8). At the battle of Alexandria, on March 21, 1801, Abercrombie was mortally wounded in the moment of victory and succumbed to his wounds on the 28th of the same month. His body was brought to Malta on board the frigate "Flora" and after lying in state was interred at Fort St. Elmo.

Chev. Paolo Parisio Muscati continued to take an active part in Maltese affairs and was one of the signatories to the petition of July 10, 1811 to His Majesty King George III. In 1825 he was appointed A.D.C. to the Marquess of Hastings then Governor of Malta (9).

When the Order of St. Michael and St. George was instituted Chev. Parisio was among the first recipients of knighthood — he was raised to the dignity of Grand Cross of this Order in 1836.

In 1841, Lord Lynedock, who as General Graham had taken an active part in the blockade of the French, revisited the scene of his past activities, and from January 25 to May 14, 1841 resided at Palazzo Parisio (10) which had been put at his disposal by his old friend, Paolo Parisio.

Chev. Parisio, now Sir Paolo Parisio, died on December 10, 1841, at the age of 65, was accorded a military funeral and interred at "Ta Gesu" Church, Valletta (11).

On the death of Paolo Parisio the old palace passed through varied vicissitudes until it was taken over by the Government in 1887 (12) for use as a General Post Office.

The advent of British rule saw the Post Office in the island under two separate administrations, the Island Post Office under the Chief Secretary to Government and the British Packet Office under the Post Master General in London. The two post offices were situated on the ground floor of the Casa del Commn Tesoro (now the Casino Maltese). The Island Post Office occupied the site at present housing the British Pharmacy, whilst the British Packet Office was housed in premises now annexed to the Casino Maltese.

The first postmaster of whom we find mention is a Mr. Montanaro. Later, Robert Macab, the first English postmaster, was appointed agent for H.M.'s Packet Office on 28 January 1817 (13). Macab's successor was a Mr. Richard James Bouchier who was entrusted with the British Packet Office and who also took charge of the Island Post Office in 1847 without claiming increased remuneration.

During the rule of the Order of St. John, some sort of postal administration must have existed as it is recorded...

(9) R. Malta Lib., Ms. 411.
(11) R. Malta Lib., Ms. 411.
that, for the benefit of the public, two vessels sailed from Malta at regular intervals carrying mail to the continent (14). The following persons were exempted from paying postage:— the Grand Master, his receiver, his three secretaries for France, Spain and Italy, the Inquisitor, the Members of the Ordinary Chamber consisting of six persons, the Commissioner of the Post Office and all ambassadors (15). The British Packet Office was moved, in 1841, from the premises in Kingsway to the ancient Banca Giuratale in Merchants Street whence, in 1887, it was removed to the present site in the Palazzo Parisio.

The top storey of Palazzo Parisio was completed after World War I to house the Audit Office.

During the Second World War the palace was partly destroyed through enemy action, and in the repairs that followed the exterior was left unaltered, though it seems that it was not found possible to restore the decorations on the walls and ceilings.

Eucharistic Fast

By the V. Rev. S. M. Zarb, O.B.E., S.Thr.M., S.S.D. (Var.), O.P., Professor in the Royal University of Malta

His Holiness Pope Pius XII in a Motu Proprio (1), beginning with the words Sacram Communionem, has introduced a substantial change in the practice of the Catholic Church concerning fast required before the reception of Holy Communion. We give the text of the Pontifical Document, as published in the Osservatore Romano of March 22, and then some comments upon it.

The Motu Proprio says:

"Early in 1953 (January 6), We proclaimed the Apostolic Constitution Christus Dominus, with which We mitigated the severity of the laws regarding Eucharistic Fasting, so that the faithful might receive Holy Communion more frequently and might more easily satisfy the rule of hearing Holy Mass on feast days. To this end We conceded to the Bishops of the dioceses the faculty of permitting the celebration of the Mass and the distribution of Holy Communion in the evening, so long as certain conditions were observed. We reduced the time of fasting to be observed before Mass or Holy Communion, celebrated or received in the afternoon, to three hours for solids and one hour for non-alcoholic liquids. The Bishops have expressed their deep gratitude to Us for these concessions, which have produced such abundant fruits, and many have begged Us unceasingly to authorise them to allow the celebra-

(1) A motu proprio is a rescript drawn up and issued by a Pope on his own initiative and signed by Himself. The Pope has His own reasons in doing so. In the present document they are clearly stated in the introductory words when the Holy Father says: "We, understanding the considerable changes which have taken place in the organisation of labour, and the public offices, and throughout social life, have thought it opportune to grant the insistent demands of the Bishops".