Egidio la corrente tomistica divenisse patrimonio ufficiale delle scuole agostiniane’ (57).

CONCLUSION.

The purpose of the present article was not to attempt anything like a comprehensive exposition of Giles of Rome’s teaching, but simply to indicate how — although during his academic career he followed in certain important theses the Augustinian tradition of thought — his Thomism is nevertheless very evident in several significant points where he is in full agreement with Aquinas.

A FURTHER DOCUMENT ON WOOD RELATING TO THE PLAGUE OF 1813-14

BY DR. PAUL CASSAR, B.SC., M.D., D.P.M., F.R.HIST.S.

The Royal University of Malta

One of the most severe epidemics of plague, that struck Malta and Gozo in the past, broke out in the early months of 1813. The disease was imported from the Levant with which Malta then had a flourishing commerce. As soon as the Maltese health authorities learned of the existence of plague at Alexandria, they imposed a strict quarantine on all ships reaching Maltese ports from the East in an effort to prevent the introduction of the infection into the Island. In spite of this precaution, however, plague invaded Malta about the middle of April (1).

The sanitary measures adopted to stem the advance of the disease were necessarily inspired by the epidemiological ideas of the time. These measures included the isolation of the sick and suspects at the Lazzaretto, the segregation of the inhabitants within their own homes in an attempt to limit communication between people as much as possible, and the infliction of the death penalty upon those who knowingly tried to conceal the presence of the plague on themselves and on others. The fact that the rat and the flea play a most important part in the transmission of the disease was then completely unknown to the medical profession; on the other hand, various materials such as feathers and hairs were wrongly thought to be responsible for the dissemination of the ‘contagion’ from one person to another. Paper was also incriminated; at first the health authorities discouraged but, later, definitely prohibited its use for wrapping goods by shopkeepers. Paper was also eschewed as writing material by some over-cautious people who, to avoid all


risks of infection, preferred to write on small wooden tablets as it was then held that plague could not be carried by wood from one person to another.

In a contribution published abroad (2), I described five such wooden tablets on which were written (a) a receipt issued on the 15th August by the Rev. Salvatore Dimech, (b) the testament of the Rev. F. Calleja of Zebugg dated 9th September, (c) a power of attorney made out by Notary Feo. Saverio Zammit of Bormla on the 19th September, (d) a letter of Baroness Maria Damico Inguein of the 5th October, and (e) a receipt over the signature of the same writer dated 2nd December 1813. The period covered by these documents extends, therefore, from the middle of August to the beginning of December 1813. Following the appearance of the above mentioned paper, my attention was drawn to a further tablet the existence of which was unknown to me at the time (3). Until very recently it hung in a frame at Villa Marnisi at Marsaxlokk (4) but is now elsewhere (5). It measures about 7½ by 5½ inches and ½ inch in thickness, is of a light brown colour and shows the grainning of the wood quite distinctly. It is worm-eaten in a few places in the lower left hand corner.

The script, which like that of the other tablets already alluded to, is in Italian, runs as follows:—

Carissima Sig.ra Cugina
Zurrico 21 Agosto 1813

Mi sono portata espressamente l’altro giorno nella sua Villa detta della Neve in compagnia della Sigra Vincenza per aver il piacere di ossequiarla e pregare nel tempo istesso a lei o alla Sigra Sua figlia onorarmi da commare


(3) I am indebted to Dr. F. Damato M.D., D.O., D.O.M.S., F.R.C.S. for bringing this tablet to my notice.

(4) Built by the Nobleman Giacomo Testaferrata de Robertis in the 17th century.

(5) In the possession of Dr. Victor Mercieca, L.L.D., who very kindly allowed me to study and publish it. I wish to thank Mr. Wilfrid Flores for the photograph.

The writer was the Marchesa Vincenza Testaferrata daughter of Marchese and Baron Giuseppe Testaferrata Viani. She married the Marchese Niccolo Testaferrata de Noto in March 1811. Niccolo was one of the pioneers who sought to obtain constitutional liberties for Malta in the first decade of the nineteenth century. In the later months of 1811 he went to London at his own expense to plead the cause of the Maltese returning to Malta in May 1812 (6).

Translated freely in English, it means:—

"Dearest cousin,

The other day I called at the 'Villa della Neve' in the company of Mrs. Vincenza to present my compliments and to ask you or your daughter to do me the honour of being a godparent, together with my father-in-law the Marchese D. Pandolfo, on the occasion of my approaching delivery. As, however, the calamitous conditions now prevailing in Malta have deprived me of this pleasure, I am writing to ask you to kindly suggest someone else in your stead. Please excuse my boldness. My husband and I send our best regards to you and to your esteemed daughter Donna Angelina.

Your most devoted and obedient cousin,

Vincenza Testaferrata.

The writer was the Marchesa Vincenza Testaferrata daughter of Marchese and Baron Giuseppe Testaferrata Viani. She married the Marchese Niccolo Testaferrata de Noto in March 1811. Niccolo was one of the pioneers who sought to obtain constitutional liberties for Malta in the first decade of the nineteenth century. In the later months of 1811 he went to London at his own expense to plead the cause of the Maltese returning to Malta in May 1812 (6).

efforts resulted in the appointment of the Royal Commission of 1812(7).

Marchese D. Pandolfo was the second-born of Enrico Testaferrata de Noto, Marchese di San Vincenzo Ferreri, a title created in 1716 by Philip V, King of Spain and the Two Sicilies (8). During the time of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem he was a cavalry ensign, and, in the early years of the British connection, a colonel of the “Reggimento dei veterani”.

The identity of “Mrs Vincenza” cannot be traced; nor is the name of the “dearest cousin” revealed in the letter, but internal evidence suggests that the recipient was the Marchesa Elisabetta Muscati, born Dorel, who was known as Bettina and was then seventy-two years old. She was the wife of Marchese Diego Muscati, whose mother was a Testaferrata (9). Bettina was Lady of Honour to the Queen of Naples, with whom she resided for many years in that capacity, and was renowned for her extensive acts of charity which her abundant means enabled her to dispense. She died at the age of eighty-eight years on the 8th September 1829 (10). Her only daughter was Donna Angelina who, in 1832, rebuilt the chapel dedicated to the ‘Madonna ad Nives’ near the villa mentioned in the letter at Marsaxlokk (11).

The reasons that gave rise to this wooden letter appear to have been the stringent quarantine measures imposed from time to time by the government, On th 12th May 1813 heads of families were instructed to hire a servant for the


(8.) NAUDE, S. & PULLICINO, P. — Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Claims of the Maltese Nobility, Malta, 1878, p. 60.

(9.) From a manuscript volume in the collection of Chev. Jos. Galea, Mdina, to whom I am grateful for help in tracing this personage.

(10.) Malta Government Gazette of 16th September 1829, p. 291.

(11.) FERRIS, A. — Descrizione storica delle chiese di Malta e Gozo, Malta, 1866, p. 382.

purchase of the necessities of life. This employee was not to be admitted into the house but was to deposit the provisions for persons living in the house. A proclamation of the 15th May ordered the inhabitants to avoid communication among themselves and to keep at a distance from one another; while a further regulation of the 1st June prohibited every unnecessary contact between families under penalty of having the whole family placed in the most rigid quarantine (12). Because of these restrictions, it is not surprising that the Marchesa Vincenza Testaferrata found it impossible to obtain the assistance of her ‘cousin’ on the occasion of her accouchement. Having failed to talk matters with her ‘cousin’, she had no option but to write to her on a wooden tablet. Very probably the tablet was left at the door of the Villa at Marsaxlokk and then passed through vinegar and immersed in the tub of water which every family had to place, by order of the sanitary authorities, at the entrance of the house and through which food and other objects were passed before being touched by the recipient.

Presumably, the Marchesa had journeyed from Zurrieq to Marsaxlokk in a ‘calessa’ — the two wheeled, mule driven carriage in common use at the time. Under the best possible condition the ‘calessa’ was never a comfortable means of transport but during the plague this jolly carriage was rendered even more trying for a woman in the Marchesa’s condition. The medical profession, in its ignorance of the cause of plague, was fighting an invisible enemy. It is not astonishing, therefore, that the terror, that the ‘contagion’ could be lurking in the upholstery of the seats and interior of these ‘calesses’, led the government to issue orders, on the 1st June, for the stripping of the cloth lining the interiors of these carriages and for the removal of their upholstery (13).

Discomfort in travelling, however, was nothing compared

(12.) BURRELL, W.H. — op. cit., p. 78.

(13.) BURRELL, W.H. — op. cit., p. 79.
with the far more serious sufferings which others had to endure, for there is no denying that the circumstances under which people lived were really "calamitous" as the Marchesa had qualified them. In fact anxiety for one's own safety was increased by the daily intelligence of the loss of the nearest friends and relations; the transfer of the sick, the dying, the dead and the suspected being an hourly occurrence and an object of constant contemplation" in many towns and villages of Malta (14).

The epidemic raged until September 1814 and carried off over 4600 of the inhabitants out of a population of 116,000 (15). The Marchesa Vincenza Testaferrata and her family, however, escaped the infection. She lived long enough to rear a family of ten children, eventually dying a widow at the age of seventy years on the 9th September 1860 (16).

(14.) Tully, J.D. — The History of Plague as it has lately appeared in the Islands of Malta, Gozo, Corfu, Cephalonia, etc., London, 1821, p. 55.


(16.) The Malta Observer of 14th September 1860, p. 3.

The letter written on wood by Marchesa Vincenza Testaferrata during the plague of 1813. The wooden tablet measures 7½ by 5½ inches and ½ inch in thickness. Photo by Mr. Wilfrid Flores.