

The Malta Standard

Thursday March 1 1883

Opening of the Malta Railway

The opening of the Malta Railway, which took place yesterday, records an event in the annals of this Island, of which the inhabitants may well be proud. After long expectations the idea mooted years ago of constructing a Railway has been realized. This sea-girl isle can now boast of a line connecting the new capital with the old, which in time may extend itself all over the surface of the Island, constructed under the superintendence of F. A. B. Geneste Esq., in the face of difficulties which the general public can hardly realize. Wednesday will indeed be remembered as a red letter day. Regular Queen's weather prevailed. A bright sun shone from a cloudless sky, the solar rays being, however, tempered by a fresh breeze from the North, and we cannot but help hoping that the future of the Railway may be as cloudless and bright as the firmament above us during the day. An account of the proceedings cannot but prove highly interesting to all, high and low, rich and poor. From an early hour the approaches to and around Valetta terminus were crowded with people anxious to get a sight of the "Benediction" train which was to start at 11 a.m., the police having no easy task in keeping back the surging crowds, who threatened to demolish the railing at Porte Reale. Punctually at the hour fixed, His grace the Archbishop of Malta accompanied by his Canons and other clergy proceeded from the Victoria Church in Strada Mezzodi to the Station, where he was received by the General Manager Mr. Geneste and a number of the clergy; a handsome bouquet being also presented to His Grace. The station having been duly blessed, the train started for Notabile, His Grace and some fifty of the clergy occupying the three first carriages, the fourth and last carriage being occupied by a few ladies, the Rev. mother of the Sliema Convent, Mrs. Geneste, Mrs. Nauda, Mrs. Gaizia and Mrs. Laferia all feeling pretty safe as it is well known that it is a fundamental principle of Railway Management "Never kill a bishop." After a short stay at Citta Vecchia, the party returned arriving at Valetta a little after midday, one and all expressing their satisfaction and pleasure. The chief feature of the proceedings was the departure of the "opening" train, which took place at 3 p.m. A party of about 150 gentlemen and a few ladies had been invited to take part in the ceremony, amongst whom were H. E. the Governor, Lady Canynghame, the Heads of the Civil Departments, representatives of the Army, Navy, Church and Press and of the community in general. Amongst others we noticed:-

Sir Victor Hou'ton, Sir Adrian and Lady Dingli, Colonels Thynne, Murray R.E., Crichton, Oldfield R.A., Dr. Carbone, Hon'bles Savons, Hoare, Inglot, Sciortino, Capt. Carr, Galizia, Marquis Apap, Baron Gauci Azzopardi, Rev. Hardy M.A., Rev. Martin, Mr. Ferro, Capt. Kirton, Major Livesay R.E., Hon. Colville R.N., Messrs Moore R.N., Martin, Captains Rawson C.B., Pitt, Ward C.B. A.D.C., Molyneux C.B., Seymour, Rice, Wilson, Stephenson, Lieuts. and Commanders Hon. Jolliffe, Garbett, Jauncey, Winsloe, Com. Darwin, Judge Pullicino LL.D., G. Rapinett LL.D., Col. Sceberras, Mr. Caruana, Sir Conte Ciantar K.C.M.G., Capt. Chev. Cohen, Messrs. Slythe, Gullcher, F. Vella, Chev. Dubany, Dr. Naudi, Marquis de Piro, Majors Buller, Bridge, Hallett, Capt. Hannat R.A., Commissary General Blacker, Dep. Com. Gen. Travers, Col. Lukin, Surg. Gen. Clutterbuck M.D., Lieuts. Colonels Johnstone, Girardot, Campbell, Hammill, Thorold, Mr. Cachia Zammit, Marquis Cassar Desain, Rev. Bedford, Chev. Rosenbusch, Mr. J. Smith, Rev. Wisely.

A special carriage was placed at the disposal of His Grace the Archbishop, who would have again accompanied the Train had he not been somewhat fatigued after the arduous duties of the morning. Special carriages were placed apart for H. E. the Governor and Lord Alcester, the latter however was unavoidably prevented from being present.

At 3 p.m. precisely the train left Valetta station, and on it sped through the tunnel, passing Floriana, Hamrun, Misida, Birchircara, Casal Lia, St. Antonio, Attard, St. Salvatore stations and reaching the terminus at Notabile in 25 minutes. Along the whole of the line at different points the people came out in their thousands to witness the "Iron Horse." who was gaily decorated with flags and flowers. Wonder and pleasure seemed intermingled on the countenances of all. There was an inclination to cheer, but they did not know how to do it.

On arrival at the Notabile platform Mrs. Geneste was in waiting to present Lady Borton with a handsome bouquet, but her ladyship was unavoidably prevented from being present owing to indisposition and Captain Borton received the floral offering on the part of her ladyship. The party then proceeded to the tents on the road above the station, H. E. the Governor and Mrs. Geneste leading the way. Refreshments were then served in the tents. Glasses having been filled with champagne, H. E. the Governor made the following speech:-

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will ask you to allow me to say a few words on this occasion on which we have met to inaugurate an undertaking which is so likely to benefit this Island that it appears to me to merit a prominent place in our annals.

I have this day the privilege of declaring that the Malta Railway be open for public traffic. And in making this announcement I cannot but express the satisfaction which I derive from the reflection that this great work of public utility, but of private enterprise, has been commenced, and thus far brought to a successful termination, during the period of my Government of these Islands, and I desire to congratulate Mr. Geneste and those who have labored with him in attaining this end on the skill and perseverance with which they have carried out this work and overcome all the difficulties of their undertaking.

It is not necessary that I should detail to you those difficulties, since we can all somewhat appreciate their extent after seeing the vast terminus in Valetta and the numerous tunnels, all excavated in the solid rock, through which we have just passed. It is sufficient that I should observe that Mr. Geneste has brought us in safety, and with speed and comfort, from the very heart of the proud City of La Valetta to the foot of this the ancient capital of the Island, which is so rich in historic associations. And if the earliest founders of that capital could but look down upon this scene, I cannot but think of the amazement which they might feel in drawing a parallel between the rapid locomotion of modern science and the slow and painful traffic of past ages, of which we still see such interesting and mysterious records in the numerous cart ruts deeply cut in the solid rocks throughout this Island..

I have learnt with satisfaction that His Grace the Archbishop Bishop of this island has invoked the Divine Blessing on this great work; and I desire to add the expression of my earnest wish that it may prove as beneficial to the promoters as, I doubt not, it will eventually prove to be to the people.

I say eventually, because I think we ought not to be too sanguine in our expectations. It appears to me probable that, for some time to come, so great a novelty may not be understood and appreciated as it deserves by a somewhat conservative people, who may perhaps be excused if they are slow to admit that the ways of their forefathers are capable of much improvement. I think therefore that many of those who may now be seen each evening streaming in hundreds from the gates of Valetta, in order to walk long distances to the homes which they left for their work in the morning, may still for a time, continue to do so, rather than expend a few pence in order to obtain speedier and less laborious means of transit. Eventually, however, I trust that they may learn the important truths that, to the industrious, time is money; and, by resorting to the Railway, tend to bring dividends to shareholders, whilst they consult their own interest.

In like manner, as regards goods traffic I think the people may be slow to commit to the Iron Horse the produce which they and their forefathers have, from time in memorial, been accustomed to bring, by night to the local markets, in their own carts and with their own cattle.

When however the project of the originators of the Railway is carried out in its entirety; when this line is connected by branch lines with St. Paul's Bay to the North and the different Casals on the South; then it will be, I think that a quicker pulse will beat through the island, and the advantages of Railway Communication will force themselves on the people, as has been the case in all other countries in which Railways have been introduced. Villas will arise on all sides to which those who are chained to their desks during the day in Valetta will be only too glad to resort, during the summer months, when their work is over in order to sleep in a more healthful atmosphere; and the value of property will be found to increase.

I will not however further detain you nor add to the fatigue of your journey that of listening to a wearisome oration. This pleasing duty, alone remains to me of proposing that we should drink to the health of Mr. Geneste, the able and courteous manager of this line and the success and expansion of the Malta Railway.

Loud cheers followed His Excellency's speech' Mr. Geneste's health and Prosperity to the Railway was drunk with three hearty hurrahs. Three cheers were then given for Mr. Geneste, who may well pride himself on the demonstration made him.

The party then adjourned to the ground around, where the prospects of the Railway were hopefully discussed and Mr. Geneste was cordially congratulated on the success attending the undertaking. The scene presented to the view was most animated and picturesque, Citta Vecchia towering above Bengemina hills in the distance and the smiling plain beneath forming a most striking sight, enhanced by the circumstances of the day. Amidst cheers from the platform the train started on its return at 4 p.m. reaching town in 22 minutes. Three cheers were then given on the platform for Mr. Geneste and H. E. the Governor. The company then slowly wended its way out, thoroughly satisfied and pleased with the entire proceedings. All the arrangements were carried out to perfection and nothing occurred to mar the harmony of the day which will long retain a green spot in the public memory. The success of the day will be an earnest for the future and PROSPERITY to the Malta Railway are our concluding words.