

## FIVE

### *An enchanted world indeed ... Fairyland!*

#### **Maltese twist – H.M.S. *Surprise* – 'Maltese ... remittent fever'**

*1876-1878; 1886 to 1889*

#### ~ Maltese twist ~

Although Britain had administered Malta as a major strategic naval port since 1814, the predominantly Roman Catholic population of approximately 150,000 was chiefly Arabic, Spanish, Italian, and French, speaking their own distinct language, derived from vernacular Arabic but officially written in Latin script. The nobility of Malta, however, was Italian and spoke Italian, and this conflict between the traditional ruling elite and their legal overlords from Britain would be the cause of most of Malta's political difficulties throughout Marie's total of nearly five years on the island.

These difficulties occasionally would affect Marie, but her Maltese *milieu* would invariably be British whenever it was intimate. Her general mistrust of England found little political expression on an island where the Anglo-Maltese enjoyed a spirited history of resistance to successive marauders. This history had bred men with a sense of political and cultural independence from the British Isles that was as much a breath of fresh air to Marie as was their Mediterranean climate. Such a man had been Sir Charles Van Straubensee, governor of Malta from 1872 to 1878. Maltese-born of Dutch descent but naturalized British, Van Straubensee had had to deal with Marie's first two exilic arrivals on his island, including the birth of her second daughter, happily finding in her the sort of woman he personally admired. Van Straubensee was a veteran of the Crimean War but he was no Russophobe. Indeed, in the Chinese war of 1860 he had gallantly aided the forces of Aleksandr II in concert with Napoleon III, a fact Marie knew.

Van Straubensee had gone out of his way to make Marie's first arrival in October 1876 unforgettable. After proceeding in state aboard the *Livadia* to greet her, he left to prepare for the official reception on the following day, announcing that she would step ashore at one o'clock. A cannonade issuing from the fort of St Elmo (at the extremity of the promontory of the harbour) was the prelude to a general cheer and procession to the governor's palace in Strada Reale, the main thoroughfare at La Valetta. This procession comprised almost every notable from the British and indigenous administration of Malta, including Rear-Admiral William Luard (soon to be appointed superintendent of Malta's dockyards) and General Lord Airey, whom her father had met in London and who had been created a peer a few months earlier.

Van Straubensee's task had been made easier by the natural warmth of the Maltese people, as *The Times* noted (25 October): 'Although the hour was inconvenient still the windows of houses were well filled, and the streets leading to the Governor's Palace ... were fairly lined, and I noticed that the uncovering of heads was pretty general, and that the courtesy was graciously acknowledged by the Duchess'. *The Malta Times* (21 October) noted what happened next: 'After a short interval the

Duchess appeared in one of the balconies with [Van Straubensee], and repeatedly bowed to the people who were collected to welcome her, as she had done, at frequent intervals during her drive from the Marina’.

To begin with, Marie had stayed in La Valetta under Van Straubensee’s roof, but two days later he made over to her his summer palace of San Antonio, about four miles away on the outskirts of the port, for this and any subsequent visit, a tradition his successor’s maintained. There was immediate need for this, as Marie’s brother Aleksei and cousin Konstantin Nikolaevich had arrived the day after her own arrival.

How did Marie find life on Malta? As with virtually everything Marie experienced, there is no simple answer. Her involvement with Malta’s social life was immediate, however. On Tuesday 25, both she and Affie attended a performance of *Jone, o L’ultimo giorno di Pompeii* by Errico Petrella, a 4-act work based on *The Last Days of Pompeii* by Bulwer-Lytton. But Marie’s life on Malta cannot be used to analyze her artistic taste, as La Valetta had only one theatre at this time; the Theatre Royal (so named due to the presence of the Edinburghs on the island) would not be built until the following year. But the orchestra played the Russian national anthem, ‘which was followed by a hearty and spontaneous cheer from the audience’, (*Malta Times* 28 October), to which Marie ‘responded with a gracious salutation’. This sort of public veneration sat very uneasily with Marie. On Saturday 5 November, she honoured the theatre again for a performance of Bellini’s *La sonnambula* ‘but declined any public recognition of that honour’ (*Malta Times* 11 November).

There were some things Marie was not prepared to do, however. The Malta Winter Race Meeting was held annually over two days – Tuesday and Thursday – in November. For the first of these, both Affie and Marie agreed to be patrons (with the governor) and both attended. Marie never graced these races again and dropped her patronage, although Affie and the resident governor continued to promote it, with Affie taking a traditional interest in determining the victor and placing a bet on the outcome.

The tension between the Maltese nobility and British residents can be gauged by an incident that occurred early the following year, one that used Marie’s presence on the island for its own political purposes, but which, in its ulterior thrust, is not altogether borne out by the facts. On Thursday 12 January 1877, Marie held her very first grand reception at San Antonio in order to introduce herself to all the islanders, taking the form of a belated Christmas party. About 400 guests attended, comprising ‘a large number of the principal Maltese families, most of the English residents, nearly all the Naval and Military Officers off duty, many Government Officials, and Foreign Consuls, and several Visitors to the Island’ (*Malta Times* 13 January). Music was provided by the bands of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Royal Highlanders and 71<sup>st</sup> Highland Light Infantry, and it would appear that everyone present enjoyed themselves immensely for several hours.

But, underneath the surface, this cannot have been the case with at least some of the indigenous Maltese Italians, as this open letter to the *Malta Times* (20 January) suggests:

I and my fellow countrymen were astonished at the extremely bad taste displayed by the Maltese nobility and gentry in complaining, through the public press, that they and their children were not invited to the Christmas Party at St Antonio Palace ... what right had they to expect any invitation ... as they in no way have contributed to the entertainments given to our illustrious visitors since their arrival on the Island? ... it is customary in all countries for the residents of a place to show some hospitality to visitors on their arrival ... before they can expect to be entertained themselves; but ... such a custom would appear to be the exception and not the rule with its Aristocracy.

The public plaintiff – signing himself ‘An Anglo-Saxon’ – was correct in one matter: there is no record of any Italian family welcoming Affie and Marie to Malta by this date. But he was incorrect in another: the Italianate nobility had been well represented at the party just as the *Malta Times* had suggested. They included representatives from most of the illustrious families, such as the Testaferrata (various branches), Zammit, de Piro, Speranza, and Sammut to list just a few. Malta had six Italian newspapers at this time, and no doubt some of those who had not been invited – for whatever reason – thought they ought to have been and complained. But it is easy to determine from the party lists published in the English-language press that parties given by Affie and Marie were invariably filled with Italian ‘nobility and gentry’, but who never reciprocated; or – and this amounts to much the same thing for the English residents mostly unfamiliar with Italian – who were never reported as having reciprocated in the English-language press.

This slight by the Italian nobility did not lessen Marie’s love of Italy; nor did it ever affect her invitations to them, which they seemed happy to accept. After the alleged complaints, but before the Anglo-Saxon leaped on his charger, on Thursday 19 January, Affie and Marie threw their first ball at San Antonio. About 500 guests danced from nine o’clock in the evening until two o’clock the following morning: ‘the band of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Royal Highlanders had very little rest’ noted *The Malta Times* (20 January). As usual, all the Italians were there. Marie partnered Van Straubenzee for the first quadrille, and supper was served at eleven o’clock ‘on a most sumptuous scale’. The paper now made its first observation on Marie:

We are pleased to see that the Imperial Duchess is not a whit behind Her Royal Relatives ... Her graciousness is the theme of all who were present ... There is a naturalness in her manner singularly attractive and taking. No one appears beneath her notice ... her eye, her manner, and her pleasant words put all at their ease.

Hardly flattery meant to ingratiate, since these were by now common enough observations by those predisposed to be fair.

One annual event Marie delighted in was the local carnival, which always included the governor’s Fancy Dress Ball, the highlight of the social season. On 24 January, Affie and Marie left for a short cruise to Athens aboard the *Sultan*, returning two weeks later in time for the ball, which always took place on the Monday of the carnival. On this occasion there were more than 750 guests in the most extravagant and carefully constructed costumes, imitating the famous carnival at Venice. Marie was the first to arrive, but she was not in costume due to her later arrival and a certain recent laxity in the rules – a laxity that would be tightened up in due course.

Marie was also quick to associate herself with various charitable societies on Malta, although for the moment she had to be content with just one, The Ladies’ Society of St Vincent de Paul, set up to fund, out of the upper-class purse, the care of the sick and the poor of Malta. Her first act, with Affie, was to become patron of a concert of sacred music at the palace armoury on Monday 26 March. In between the ball and the concert was another short cruise, from Wednesday 14 to Sunday 18, to Syracuse, Messina, and Palermo.

When Marie returned to Malta in October 1877, her life resumed the course that she had already established. Although events in England and the Russo-Turkish War had determined her presence on the island, they had precious little effect on anything she did there, the incident with the Russian bass being a conspicuous exception. On Saturday 17 November (postponed from the previous Wednesday due to rain), Marie oversaw the naval athletic competition for the crew of the *Sultan*. For three-and-a-half

hours in the afternoon there were nineteen events from the high jump and tug-o'-war to climbing a thirty-foot greasy pole, 'Disraeli-style', to see who could reach the top in the shortest time (Disraeli took thirty years to achieve this; the winner here did it in under two minutes). Most amusing, however, was an 'all-in' competition to see who could reach the end of a horizontal greasy pole at the end of which was a 'Maltese Pig, a Regular Squeaker', which was the prize for the winner. Afterwards, there was a general prize-giving ceremony at which Marie officiated. The following Saturday saw her for the first time at the new Theatre Royal for a performance of Verdi's *Aida*, accompanied by Affie and Van Straubenzee.

While the Jingoës were expressing themselves in England, Marie was participating in the carnival of March 1878, having run a bazaar for The Ladies' Society of St Vincent de Paul on 27 February. She was seen 'on Monday and Tuesday ... with other ladies, at one of the Palace balconies ... extremely liberal in showering down sweets on the crowd below' (*Malta Times* 9 March). The English-language press was deeply critical of the Malta carnival, rather sneering at it and reckoning it to be anachronistic and unworthy of the 'modern times' in which it supposed the world to be living at the time. Be that as it may, the carnival was highly topical this time, featuring a rumbustious burlesque on the Eastern Question in which ridiculous figures representing Russia, Austria-Hungary, Prussia, Bulgaria, and Turkey agreed to go to Baden Baden for the Congress of Ambassadors (then under way in Constantinople) in order to take the waters. On Monday 5 March, Marie was once again at the governor's Fancy Dress Ball, and again she was not in fancy dress. The public complaints about this were mounting.

Marie left for another cruise, this time to Sicily, on Wednesday 14 March, returning ten days later. In a generally uneventful spring, one very unfortunate incident occurred on Sunday 15 April that has escaped official documentation and now exists in only two newspaper reports, one sober the other somewhat fanciful. The sober report was given by *The Malta Times* on 20 April: '[Marie] was coming from San Antonio, by the Misida road, and driving her carriage at a rather speedy pace, [when] a little child named Antonio Gerada [aged four] ... ran across the road and, before the Duchess could pull up, was under the horse's feet'. Marie 'drove with all speed' back to San Antonio but not finding a doctor in the vicinity was obliged to go to the harbour where she secured the services of two naval surgeons. The boy's condition was not serious, and Marie left his father 'a sum of money sufficient to procure for the little sufferer every necessary relief ... We hear that [she] has since called several times to make inquiries ... and has only ceased her visits because [the boy] has quite recovered from the accident'.

Another account of this near tragedy found its way into the *Kentish Express* (11 May) via a Maltese 'correspondent'. Marie was driving her pony-trap along the narrow stony roads --as indeed she often did -- when she knocked down a local child:

... who darted into the roadway in that sudden manner which there is no eluding. Her Imperial Highness at once lifted the urchin into her carriage and drove off to the doctor. The latter, a native of the island, being a stupid fellow, could not be made to understand the affair, though tried by the Duchess in English, Russian and French successively. 'Whoever heard of a doctor not knowing either English or French?' cried the Duchess with impatience. 'And whoever heard of a Duchess knowing Maltese?' retorted *il medico*, in his own lingo, by some means comprehending what was said. Her Imperial Highness was not, however, so easily defeated, and despatching messengers to both the *Minotaur* and the *Defence*, she obtained eventually the assistance of surgeons from both those warships. Not satisfied with half measures, moreover, the Duchess not only sent her own medical man daily to the child, but was also most assiduous in calling herself, and giving practical advice to the

parents as to the treatment of the patient, not forgetting to afford them both constant and substantial pecuniary assistance.

Shorn of the preposterous verbal exchange, the unfortunate incident itself is entirely credible. Marie several times in her life noted with some pride how much she enjoyed driving her pony-traps at a speed not precisely calculated to ensure the safety of members of the public who may have been unwise enough to dart into the road in a 'sudden manner'. But the most characteristic feature of the fanciful account as published by the *Kentish Express* is the intractable Anglo-Italian quarrel apparent everywhere on the island. And once again, had Marie read this item, she would have found herself being used – abused – to promote the conflict as perceived by another 'Anglo-Saxon'.

Van Straubenzee had retired during Marie's second exile, to be replaced by General Sir Arthur Borton, yet another Crimean veteran, whom Marie did not have opportunity to acquaint before her departure. Malta had suffered in 1882 as a result of the civil war in Egypt, fought by indigenous Islamic nationalists against Turkish influence and Anglo-French administrative control. In June, the coastal port of Alexandria, already riddled with *cholera morbus*, suffered a massacre by the Egyptians with several thousand Europeans and some Turks escaping to Malta, bringing the disease with them. Most of the survivors chose to remain and became Maltese, thoroughly changing the nature of La Valetta before Marie's third stay. Borton had retired in 1884, and by extraordinary good fortune he had been replaced by another friend – Sir John Simmons, now a full general who had been the military delegate at the Congress of Berlin.

Marie and her children arrived at La Valetta after 'a quite horrible passage' during which she 'spent all my nights on the bridge in a little deck-house' because she 'could not face the cabins below where everybody was being sick all round'.<sup>1</sup> The *Osborne* had been expected at ten o'clock in the morning, but had 'met the full force of the Easterly gale' (*Malta Standard* 4 November), and docked in the afternoon to the sound of *God Save the Queen* being played on the quay by a military band, while Simmons stood to attention to receive them. 'Every available space was occupied by the guests and crowds of spectators, who included a large number of ladies, whose dresses, together with the red uniform of the soldiers, and the blue of the sailors ... combined to make up a very attractive picture'.

Missy remembered this moment with Simmons as 'the typical Englishman dear to foreign imagination, red-faced, portly, with white whiskers, strapped into a tight scarlet uniform, crowned with cocked hat and white feathers, a cheerful, hearty gentleman with an optimistic outlook upon life'.<sup>2</sup> The occasion must have been memorable to them all, for two years later Marie recalled it when contrasting two very different arrivals:

There was a great storm and the sea turned quite rough. My elder daughters were seasick, but this passed soon enough at the joy on arriving at Malta and seeing their father. We were joined by all the beautiful ships of the Duke's squadron as we passed to enter the port. The weather suddenly improved and beautiful sunshine bathed the entire land. The children were all dressed in white, with radiant faces awaiting their father ... soon we disembarked with great ceremony, cannon fire, a guard of honour ... A new governor with a magnificent presence, very tight in his uniform, presented a splendid picture. He remained as though planted on the quay, so dignified in his immobility that we forgot all about the Duke and I pretended to make an assault on him since he just would not flinch. He was then obliged to respond to such a compliment – well meant on my part – and the ice was broken!<sup>3</sup>

Missy subsequently claimed that this had been their first visit to Malta, which of course it was not. In most respects, however, mother and daughter appear to have agreed with each other when recalling this reception – other than that Missy made no reference to her mother's amusing mock attack on the dignified British governor, frozen in his posture of salute, whom she so warmly de-iced.

Missy continued with her child-like but (in this case) accurate memories:

A rapidly descending dusk had wiped the orange radiance out of the sky, earth and sea ... It was quite dark by the time we reached San Antonio ... beloved house! Oh, the incredible joy of awaking next morning in a new world! ... Our bedroom opened out onto a wee stone flight of stairs leading into the garden. Half-way down those stairs was a little flat roof on to which you could step ... A walled-in oasis, Eastern and secret-looking, a maze of trees ... and, running through it all, a criss-cross of glazed paths. Beyond the encircling walls, more trees ... Here there were no tidy beds ... but large pieces of ground divided only by paths, and in these, everything grew higgledy-piggledy, a lovely mass of colour saturating the whole place with exquisite fragrance. Over this medley of flowers hovered a thousand bees and butterflies ... There was jasmine, large-flowered and sweet-scented, and tree-high geraniums, verbena, roses and large clumps of feathery white chrysanthemums, tumbling in snowy cascades right over the paths, strewn with a thousand petals; there were violets, narcissi, anemones, besides every sort of flower unknown to northern climes. An enchanted world indeed ... Fairyland!<sup>4</sup>

The summer palace was also 'a surprise, a revelation':

The house itself was enormous with spacious, stone-flagged rooms without end, and long covered galleries running out into promenades upon the top of the high walls, which separated the gardens from each other. The architecture was fascinating ... The roofs, being flat and on several levels [meant that] ... you could walk all over them ... having a bird's-eye view of San Antonio's topography ... Mamma's private boudoir was a long, deliciously cool room with a little stairway leading into one of the gardens, the smallest and the most shady of them all. A glazed path ran right through its centre and at the farther end was a tree ... a thick-set, wide-spreading tree ... and its flowers bloomed an ardent orange before its leaves were green ... In this garden Mamma had allowed the gardener to build a miniature grotto for each of us, in a sponge-like stone peculiar to the island ... There was something indescribable about these ridiculous little grottoes ... According to our idea, we added to [their] mystery by placing a little earthenware dish of water in the centre of each. These represented enchanted pools, and we had wee goldfish, the smallest that could be found, swimming about in these dishes ... When I returned to Malta about forty years later, the son of the old gardener of yore showed me with great pride the Russian violets H.I.H. the Duchess of Edinburgh had planted during our stay at San Antonio the beloved.<sup>5</sup>

Predictably, Missy's wretched goldfish did not find the small dish all that enchanting and soon expired

Marie's views on Malta were unencumbered by the illusions of childhood. During her first visit to the island, she had described San Antonio as 'our big comfortable house ... in the middle of pretty little gardens, very small indeed after English parks but full of orange trees and flowers. The rooms are immense and high and very cool'.<sup>6</sup> It was so cool in fact that a decade later she was still making the point that 'the rooms get rather chilly and we have to keep up large fires'; but the children were small and did notice such things: 'it is still all new to them and they do not see how ugly and uninteresting the country is'.<sup>7</sup> Malta exhibits some variety in landscape and environment, but on the whole the main island consists of a fractured and warped plateau composed of Miocene rock series. Marie had always found it 'an ugly country'<sup>8</sup> where, like with all essentially barren landscapes, the over-zealous attempts to prettify small patches of ground and call them gardens served only to accentuate the surrounding monotony.

Nevertheless, for the following three years Malta gave Marie the opportunity to experience a more liberal, if limited, society in which she was considered by common

consent the leading hostess on the island – perhaps to the chagrin of the indigenous aristocracy, who once again failed to be civil on her arrival. *The Malta Times* (6 November), however, had given her a rapturous welcome commencing with eight lines of doggerel of which these are the first four:

Welcome! brightest jewel of an Imperial Crown,  
Illustrious Princess! England's joy and pride,  
Our Queen's adopted, our Prince Alfred's own,  
A nation's hope, resounded far and wide.

But the reality was that Marie had not been looking forward to the stay, having already decided that Malta would never be the paradise Missy thought it to be in her girlish mind, writing Lady Randolph Churchill from Coburg prior to her arrival:

I enjoy my life here and am simply shuddering at the idea of going so soon into that most dull Maltese exile! So far from everybody, so far from one's friends and relations, separated from all the world. I am trying to work myself up into a state of resignation but feel very rebellious. If it were only Italy, or Sicily, I would rejoice with all my heart, but that dreadful, lonely island and the unattractive society there. It cannot be helped, however, and I will have to brave it as well as I can.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of this, Marie hosted social events frequently and regularly, just as before, and particularly for British naval men. These naval parties – held mostly without Affie who was often on duty – became popular for their generosity and lack of pomp.

Her first public social event was undertaken as early as 1 November when she saw a performance of Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at the Theatre Royal, which was 'fairly well executed', according to the *Malta Standard* (4 November). On Tuesday 2, she and Affie hosted a dinner for all British naval officers on Malta, followed on the succeeding day by another dinner for the officers of the *Osborne*. On Thursday 4, Simmons officially welcomed Affie and Marie with a dinner of over 600 guests at his palace. The first ball Affie and Marie threw took place at Admiralty House on the Strada Mezzodi facing the sea on Wednesday 1 December, given in honour of Alix's 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday. There were 350 guests – the usual eclectic mix – and again a late supper described as 'surpassing elegance and liberality' by *The Malta Times* (4 December), who on Christmas Day published a personal message of goodwill to the Edinburghs on their front page.

Among Marie's first high-profile guests visiting Malta, whom she entertained on Sunday 7 November, were the duke of Manchester – former Conservative politician and quondam lord of the bedchamber to Prince Albert – and Lord and Lady Rosebery. The earl of Rosebery had been foreign secretary in Gladstone's short-lived administration that had collapsed the previous August, and he and his wife were at the start of a tour of India, having left Gibraltar on 3 November and stopping off at Malta for a brief sightseeing tour. Having acquired his Buckinghamshire estate of Mentmore through his wife (a Rothschild by birth), he had written from there to Henry Ponsonby on 21 October 1886 denying any personal or party responsibility for the Bulgarian crisis, insisting that both privately and publicly he had backed Sandro to the end. However, he had done this without at the same time taking a wildly Russophobic position. In 1877, Rosebery had spoken vigorously in the House of Lords against Disraeli's position on the Eastern Question; on 10 October 1878, following his election as lord rector of Aberdeen, he had delivered a blistering attack on the Congress of Berlin, denouncing its status as a preserver of Britain's route to India against the alleged 'shameful intrigues' of Russia.

Despite the meteorological attractions of the island, and the hospitality of most of the ordinary inhabitants, there was a deeply sardonic twist to Marie's reception of Maltese life. She was quite unmoved by it to alter her natural jaded and cynical view of human society, writing Lady Randolph Churchill that Malta was 'dull and monotonous' and that the people were 'second rate and uninteresting'.<sup>10</sup> For Missy, however, the years on Malta consisted in a perpetual round of horseplay, with and without horses, in the company of 'young and happy' people 'who had no *Hintergedanken*'.<sup>11</sup>

Marie soon discovered – if she had not already learned during her earlier visits – that she had left one island with its insular attitudes only to land on another whose mentality gave rise to racial and cultural tensions not dissimilar to those she had left behind. The privileged status of the Italian Maltese nobility – and therefore of their language, culture, and habits – had eventually led to a political civil war on Malta throughout the 1880s. This had resulted in a victory for the anti-Italian Anglo-Maltese coalition Nationalists led by the lawyer and physician Fortunato Mizzi in conjunction with Count Strickland della Catena, the subsequent founder of the *Times of Malta*. Mizzi and Strickland would succeed in obtaining a popular legislative constitution on 22 December 1887 whose council would consist of fourteen elected and six nominated members, with the nationalists gaining a landslide victory in the local council elections. More significantly, the governor appointed by the British Crown would be reduced to the status of a ceremonial figurehead, with real authority resting in the office of chief secretary, a post that would be held by Strickland.

Marie passed no judgement on these internal affairs, but it cannot be entirely without significance that she did not cultivate serious and lasting friendships with either the indigenous Italian nobility or their Maltese politicians outside the numerous invitations they regularly received to her social events. There is an irony in the fact that although Marie would never cease to complain about the narrow-minded stupidity of most of her English or Anglo-Maltese guests, she never attempted to penetrate the allegedly more cosmopolitan (but in fact even more narrow-minded) Maltese Establishment; she associated only with those for whom she had little sympathy. It seems likely, however, that the 'Anglo-Saxon' had had a valid point to make in spite of politicizing a Christmas party, and the established social hierarchy did not permit Marie to make overtures towards it. Probably the Anglophobia the Nationalists had provoked within the Italianate Maltese was directed as much towards her – as a British duchess – as it was towards the governor and the Maltese Anglophiles. These politico-cultural tensions and the problems they brought with them would eventually be swept into the surrounding sea, but regrettably they outlasted Marie's three-year tenancy of San Antonio. It remains a sad fact that in spite of Marie's persistent cordiality towards the Italian families of Malta, in all her surviving correspondence from her five years on the island there is not one mention of any invitation from them to inhabit, however briefly, their indigenous society. Perhaps it had come as a shock to Marie to learn that the English were in fact not quite the most insular and racially-prejudiced peoples in Europe, and that the Italianate Maltese could outdo them in this at every turn.

Among the ordinary Maltese, however, there would never be any indication that Marie's presence among them was unwelcome. She was still the most celebrated and elevated person on the island, and they did not forget that Ducky had been born there in 1876 – the first royal birth on Malta – and had been given as her second name the ancient (allegedly Phoenician) toponym of the island, 'Melita'. It had been a decision prompted by popular opinion, as *The Malta Times* noted (2 December):

Malta now claims the honour of being the birth-place of a Royal child. No other colony in her Majesty's broad possessions can claim the same ... The Royal parents have, no doubt, already decided upon names ... We hope we shall be pardoned for intimating that there is a wish very prevalent amongst all classes of the Maltese and English community, that ... Malta will not be lost sight of. *Melita* would not, we think, be the least euphonious of the many names that will be thought of.

This widespread public feeling was recognized by Affie and Marie, who were given permission by Queen Victoria, provided that her own name was given first, and so on 16 December, the Maltese were informed by their government that *Melita* had been accepted by the Edinburghs for their daughter. Almost immediately, the theatre at Sliema – a town and suburb of La Valetta on a headland forming the northwesterly approach to Marsamuscetto harbour – was renamed the Teatro Principessa Melita.

External political matters of course interested Marie a good deal more than internal affairs during her stay on Malta, her three years there being particularly rich in treaties that would help set the stage for Anglo-Russian relations in the period leading up to the Great War. A series of diplomatic notes between Britain, Italy, and Austria-Hungary in February and March 1887 resulted in an accord over the *status quo* in the Mediterranean, while a Second Treaty of the Triple Alliance between Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary – originally concluded at Vienna in 1882 – was signed at Berlin on 20 February. On 18 June, Bismarck concluded a secret 'Reinsurance Treaty' with Tsar Aleksandr III by which Russia was to remain neutral in any European conflict against Germany unless Germany attacked France, and Germany was to remain neutral in any European conflict against Russia unless Russia attacked Austria-Hungary.

More importantly for the still unresolved Bulgarian crisis, an 'Additional and very secret Protocol' was also signed by which 'Germany engages to accord her benevolent neutrality and her moral and diplomatic support' to any Russian incursion in the Balkans and the Straits that the tsar 'may deem it necessary to take to guard the key of His Empire', and also 'in no case' to assent to the restoration of Sandro to Bulgaria. This agreement contravened Bismarck's delicately poised series of alliances and would have brought them crashing down had it become public knowledge at the time. However, the primary objective of defusing Russo-German tension had been achieved. This would be consolidated by the tsar's visit to Berlin in November and the publication, on 3 February 1888, of the alliance between Bismarck and Andr assy that had been signed at Vienna in 1879, which was Bismarck affecting to demonstrate before the world that Germany's commitments were purely defensive.

On 12 December 1887, a second nine-clause Mediterranean agreement was signed in London between Britain and its proposer Austria-Hungary, confirmed by Nigra at Vienna four days later. The 'sick man' was still at the heart of foreign diplomacy. Clause 4 granted the 'independence of Turkey, as guardian of important European interests ... of all preponderating influences'. Clause 7 stated that 'In case of Turkey resisting any illegal enterprises [the ceding or delegating of suzerain rights over Bulgaria, the Straits, or its authority in Asia Minor] ... the three Powers will immediately [consider] the measures to be taken for causing to be respected the independence of the Ottoman Empire and the integrity of its territory'.

At Belgrade on 28 January/9 February 1889, the 1881 Treaty of Alliance between Serbia and Austria-Hungary was extended to 1895. Bulgaria and Romania were now pro-Austrian by treaty as well as inclination, while Britain remained openly supportive of their anti-Russian position. The net result of all these treaties was to isolate Russia and push it into an eventual alliance with France as the only remaining

sympathetic power in Europe. Salisbury hoped that these alliances would keep the Russian bear in its lair where it would either live or die according to the consequences of its own limited actions. He harboured no particular desire to see it perish, but reckoned that British interests would not be served by any direct intervention one way or another. Since he did not believe that a direct conflict with Russia was possible due to geographical considerations (the Crimean War notwithstanding), it was a matter of maintaining Russian speculative expansionism separate from British interests.

The question of a new ruler for Bulgaria after Sandro's exit was not resolved by the election of Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg Gotha as prince on 7 July 1887. 'Abdul-Hamid declared the election invalid eight days later, and, early in the following March, Nikolai de Giers sent a circular note to the sultan supporting his position. It was also addressed to the powers, stating Russia's non-recognition of Ferdinand as prince of Bulgaria and demanding his immediate removal. Giers was supported by Bismarck and Pierre Tirard's ministry in France under the long-serving President Sadi Carnot, who did much to bring about the Franco-Russian alliance by influencing the selection of premiers and ministers who, like Tirard, favoured such an alliance. Austria-Hungary, Britain, and Italy of course opposed the Giers note. On 6 March, 'Abdul-Hamid restated his earlier position, and he formally announced to Stambolov that Ferdinand's status as prince was illegal, though the sultan was in no position to remove him by force.

Marie read the principal English-language newspaper of the island (*The Malta Times and the United Service Gazette*) like almost everyone else. However, her preferred method of obtaining political information about England was through those on the serious fringes of political life who would not compromise themselves by revealing information to her. Most especially useful at this time was Lady Randolph Churchill, whose erratic husband had resigned as chancellor of the exchequer from Salisbury's second administration in January 1887, becoming both free and content to pass information on to his wife who then passed it on to Marie. However, Marie felt less able to reciprocate, perhaps due to her more delicate position both on Malta and that which certainly awaited her back in England on her inevitable return. On 24 February, she explained that she spoke little about English politics because 'I understand so little about English affairs':

and as to foreign politics, it is generally dangerous and delicate ground for me, especially the Bulgarian question, and in higher spheres one has worked oneself into regular sentimentality and I am looked down upon as a worse enemy. Unfortunately, I know too much of the real truth to be considered quite safe, and a prudent silence has become my politics to which I stick.<sup>12</sup>

Marie's comment on being ignorant of 'English affairs' was laughably disingenuous, although it was an excuse she employed on a number of occasions to her correspondents in order to spare herself from making injudicious remarks she might subsequently regret, should knowledge of them become known. This may have been an exaggerated fear, but that respecting her need for 'prudent silence' on foreign affairs was not, perhaps especially since relations with Queen Victoria were improving slightly but noticeably during the final phase of the Bulgarian crisis. It was the queen who appears to have initiated this reconciliation – perhaps from a keen sense of guilt – with Marie only too happy to respond accordingly:

I cannot tell you how touched and flattered I felt when I read it [your letter]. You always have a kind word for me and that goes to my heart. I do not deserve your praise. I only strive to do my best to be kind to others and am always tormented by the idea that I am not doing half enough.<sup>13</sup>

~ H.M.S. *Surprise* ~

Affie's flagship in the Mediterranean was the *Alexandra*, but for private use he had been given the new twin screw steel despatch vessel *Surprise*, commissioned at Portsmouth on 20 July 1886. Taking the helm was the respected professional captain Commander Charles Le Strange (who was also naval equerry to Affie) with 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Seymour Fortescue as his second-in-command. The *Surprise* was a vessel set aside for private cruises and certain diplomatic missions, but, on those occasions when Affie had no need of it, he gave it over to Marie for her own purposes, and she would make very full use of this privilege throughout her third stay on Malta.

Her first cruise was brief, undertaken to Syracuse, Messina, Palermo, and Sciortino from Sunday 5 December to Tuesday 14 1886. Marie would then spend three months on Malta before her next and more protracted absence. On New Year's Day 1887, there was a children's party aboard the *Alexandra* at which Affie conducted a toy band (wooden instruments for very young children) while the children danced. Loosy and Lorne arrived for the first of several visits on Tuesday 25 January, and that evening Affie threw 'the most magnificent Ball which has ever been witnessed on the Island' (*Malta Times* 29 January) for Marie as a 13<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary gift. There were 720 guests present. On Tuesday 8 and Wednesday 9 February, Affie and Marie were patrons of the Grand Bazaar given in aid of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Rest, a Temperance House under Wesleyan ministers, raising £700 of which £50 had been given by the royal patrons.

It was carnival time again, with the governor's Fancy Dress Ball given on Monday 21 February, to which 940 persons had been invited. By now, enough complaints had been made regarding certain persons who persisted in evading getting themselves up that no one was permitted to attend without a costume. Accordingly, Marie and Loosy came as 'Powder and Patches' (eighteenth-century aristocratic *coquettes* of the *Ancien régime*). 'The splendid parures of diamonds ... were highly admired', noted the *Malta Times* (24 February) with some delicacy. Affie came as a sixteenth-century Boyar dressed in an original historic costume that the tsar had given him during his coronation in 1883; it was only the second time that he had worn it. Le Strange – living up to his family name, perhaps – came as 'El Conde Duque d'Olivarez'. Conde-Duque Gaspar de Guzmán de Olivares was the statesman who for nearly twenty-two years effectively ruled Spain in the early seventeenth century as the favourite of the king. Authoritarian, ruthless, and ambitious, he would be forever remembered by all the autonomous regions of Spain as the (to them) odious man who brutally suppressed the slightest tendency to separatism.

This was the last major social function Marie attended. On Monday 28 March, she left Malta aboard the *Surprise* for Villefranche, Cannes, and Nice. Loosy and Lorne left Malta for Naples aboard the *Alexandra* on Sunday 3 April before returning to England. On 30 April, the *Surprise* left France in order that she and her daughters should see Prince Alfred in Germany, docking at Naples where they then travelled overland via Florence and Munich. They arrived at Coburg on Saturday 7 May and remained in Germany until Victoria's Golden Jubilee celebrations in England, set to begin on 21 June. On 6 June, Marie wrote Lady Randolph Churchill stating that she was looking forward to seeing her in London but regretted that this should have to be during the oppressive atmosphere of an English summer, which according to her rendered the dirty air of London impossible to breathe. Fortunately, she said, Victoria had lent her the use of Osborne Cottage, which as it turned out would be very

fortunate since Britain would experience an eleven-week drought from June to mid-August.

The girls were left behind in Germany and Marie arrived at Clarence House on 13 June, while Affie arrived four days later with Prince Alfred. Sergei and Ella were already lodged there as the official representatives of the tsar. Marie did her duty, appearing at the grand procession and *Te Deum* – composed in the early 1840s by Prince Albert – at Westminster Abbey opening the Jubilee, and also posing for Laurits Tuxen for what would become the official composite portrait of the entire royal family at the Jubilee. On Thursday 23, accompanied by Sergei and Ella, Marie dined with the duke of Cambridge at a dinner party at his London home before moving down to the Isle of Wight for the rest of her stay. Other than a very few brief excursions to London, she rarely emerged from the Cottage until she left for Malta, her only visitors being Lady Randolph Churchill and her son Winston, who became Prince Alfred's constant and close playmate during this period.

An exception to this sedentary life occurred towards the end of July. The Royal National Lifeboat Institution took delivery of a new 35-foot lifeboat for the port of Bembridge, on the east coast of the island about ten miles from Osborne, on Wednesday 20. To mark the occasion of the Jubilee, the institution asked permission to name the boat after the queen, and permission was granted. Although Victoria had arrived at Osborne by this time, it was Marie – perhaps as the royal wife of a naval officer – who was asked to perform the ceremony. On Thursday 28, she travelled to Bembridge, named the boat 'Queen Victoria' as it was launched into the harbour, and then returned to Osborne Cottage.<sup>14</sup>

Affie left for Malta and his naval duties early in July, with Marie following him at the end of August, travelling overland to reach Coburg on 2 September. On Monday 5, Marie left for Venice, arriving on the following day where Affie was waiting for her aboard the *Surprise*, having just returned from a diplomatic mission to 'Abdul-Hamid at Constantinople to placate him over the recent threat from Greece. The children, meanwhile, had been left at Coburg to be brought down to Naples where the *Surprise* was due to collect them before returning to Malta for a brief rest before embarking for the first leg of the next cruise, to Pompeii, towards the end of September. Disaster was to disrupt these plans, but first something should be said about the principal officers whom Marie knew aboard the *Surprise*.

Charles Le Strange had been well known to Marie since she had first met him in England several years earlier. His younger brother, Guy, was an orientalist whom Marie was at this time encouraging to edit the correspondence between Princess Dorothea Lieven and the late Whig politician the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Grey, in which task she succeeded and which he would publish in 1890. The family, originally from Anjou but a branch of which had settled in England shortly after the Norman Conquest, was a noted Norfolk one whose seat (held by Hamon, the eldest of three brothers) was at Hunstanton Hall on the east coast of the Wash. This was just a few miles north of Sandringham, and Marie was accustomed to seeing all the Le Strange family members there during the annual November visits to Bertie's Norfolk estate. Thus Marie regretted the fact that Charles Le Strange decided to take a leave of absence in July 1887. When he returned, on 1 January 1889, it was to take a position aboard the *Dreadnought*, the Mediterranean battleship and flagship recommissioned at Malta on 13 December 1887.

However, one of the regulars at the naval parties since January 1887 was Maurice Archibald Bourke, a highly respected captain currently without a command. Bourke, a younger son of the late earl of Mayo (an Irish peer and a noted politician and colonial

administrator), was always ‘very cheerful and ready to arrange any fun, cotillions, theatricals, picnics. He often comes to us and I have arranged “naval teas” in the afternoons, very cheerful small parties, I can assure you’.<sup>15</sup> Marie soon secured his appointment to the *Surprise*, Bourke taking up his position on 25 July 1887. She had the highest regard for him: ‘[he is] such a thorough gentleman ... immensely liked in the service and is an excellent officer and a very amiable man, cheerful, attentive, and good-natured ... I am so pleased that I had started the idea and insisted on it’.<sup>16</sup> Seymour Fortescue, who remained as second-in-command, was ‘a very kind boy, intelligent, passably cultivated, and with whom I exchange books’.<sup>17</sup> The invited guests were Lorne, Charly, and Bertie’s second son Prince George (‘Georgie’), now serving aboard the ironclad *Thunderer* in Affie’s Mediterranean Squadron.

Marie adored the Mediterranean, especially Italian art, taking every opportunity to visit some new part of Italy during each cruise. As Fortescue later put it, Marie ‘was devoted to Italian art, and lost no opportunity of seeing everything that was worth seeing ... were I to catalogue all the interesting places that the *Surprise* visited ... the result would be a portion of “Bædeker” on Italy’.<sup>18</sup> Pompeii was certainly one of the ‘lions’ of any European tour, and the *Surprise* anchored on the southern instep of the Golfo di Napoli. There the party disembarked to view the ruins, and they were given a personal tour by Eustace Neville-Rolfe, the British consul and acknowledged Pompeii expert. Neville-Rolfe had been taken entirely by surprise by the visit, but he nevertheless hurriedly arranged for a team of local archæologists to descend on the buried Roman city and finish excavating a particular room they had been working on for Marie’s benefit. But, in keeping with the unpredictable nature of archæology, everyone was a little disappointed when the results turned out to be rather unspectacular.

A far more serious disappointment was to come. The transmission of quasi-tropical contagious diseases throughout the Mediterranean was a problem for the various authorities who at that time had only one effective way of preventing an epidemic: isolation. The Edinburgh children had arrived at Naples, according to plan, while Affie and Marie were still in Venice, but an outbreak of cholera there forced the local authorities to place them (and every one else) under quarantine. Marie and the rest of the party were free to continue from Venice as they had not passed through an infected area, but she was not permitted to remove her children from the affected area in Naples and return to La Valetta. Affie petitioned the Maltese government to make an exception, but his petition was in vain as it was claimed that the outbreak of cholera on the island was just then being brought under control. On 23 September, it was announced that Affie and Marie had contributed £200 to the cholera relief fund, which had grown to a total of £1434 18s 6d. Marie had no choice but to leave her children at Naples, stranded with their staff, and subsequently thought this ‘quite absurd, as a few cases of cholera still exist at Malta’ even as late as October.<sup>19</sup>

However, the first leg of the cruise, which of course now ran immediately after the previous one and without the children, took the adult party up the Adriatic Sea to Zadar in Dalmatia on 26 September. This geographical region of the Balkan peninsula was administered by Austria-Hungary, but it had a colourful history resulting in a region divided between Roman and Greek influences with Zadar being predominantly Slavic. Marie found the locality very charming, ‘full of country people bringing in the grapes and all were dressed in beautiful costumes’.<sup>20</sup> After Zadar, the *Surprise* steamed on to Venice for a day before making its way down the Adriatic again.

The cruise continued, returning to the lower Adriatic and making a one-week tour of Montenegro, arriving at the Bay of Cattaro on Friday 7 October to find Affie – now

a full admiral-of-the-fleet – and much of his squadron already there. Bourke and Georgie joined Marie on the following day for the journey inland to Cetinje, which was reached after ‘a magnificent drive of six hours over the mountains’, as she wrote her children in Naples on Monday 3/15:

You never saw such a splendid view and such a magnificent road ... On the Tuesday we went on an expedition to the lake of Scutari ... We first went by road, then down a river in a small steamer and into the lake, with a grand mountain scenery ... I was so pleased to get news twice from you here. I hope Sandra has been to the dentist ... Arrange a nice birthday for Alfred.<sup>21</sup>

The final stop on the cruise was Greece; or more precisely two Ionian islands: Kerkira on 13 October for a few days then Kefallinía on Wednesday 19. Formerly British but lost to King George in 1864, apart from a thin strip of coastal land Kefallinía is entirely mountainous. Marie found it ‘a rather dull and uninteresting place ... nothing to see here, a very dirty little town [Argostolion] and the scenery is not very fine’.<sup>22</sup> Affie returned to Malta on Friday 28 October, and the *Surprise* returned very early in the morning of Monday 7 November with her children who had at last been rescued from their Neapolitan predicament. According to the *Malta Standard* (10 November), they disembarked ‘looking remarkably well’ after their ordeal.

Apart from the bureaucratic nonsense regarding the children, the cruise was considered a great success, with Bourke and Fortescue admired by every one they met, including the children. Missy in particular developed a girlish crush on Bourke (who when the crisis receded had fetched the children from Naples), recording that she and her sisters ‘would have gone through fire and water for him’.<sup>23</sup> While at Venice, a group photograph of the party was taken on deck aboard the *Surprise*; on 23 November, Marie sent a copy to Countess Tolstaia, telling her that the memory of it would remain with her for the rest of her life.

On 13 January 1888, comments to Lady Randolph Churchill followed their customary course as Marie wrote of the ‘slight boredom of the Malta life, its uninteresting course’.<sup>24</sup> Ten months later she was even more dismissive in a letter to Duchess Alexandrine:

My God, the men are so worthless! They are always the same, apathetic, dull and sluggish, at times enlivened by gaiety or seriousness, but apart from that morally and physically soporific. Yet still one likes them – everybody likes them – and one welcomes them with open arms! ... I consent to see a few people for dinners, plenty of sailors and soldiers with their tedious wives dressed in such a way as to strike the elegant Lady Mary [Fitzwilliam] with terror.<sup>25</sup>

Shortly after her letter to Lady Randolph Churchill, however, Marie relieved her boredom when on Monday 17 January she took another two-week cruise around Sicily.

Soon after her return it was carnival time again, from Saturday 11 to Tuesday 14 February, with the governor’s Fancy Dress Ball set for Monday 13. What squabbles had taken place behind the scenes of this premier social event are lost, but it was now announced in the press that certain of the 917 invited guests would after all be exempt from having to get themselves up as prehistoric Russian noblemen, Courtly French *dames* of a slightly disreputable kind, and long-dead proto-fascist Spanish politicians. The announced list comprised members of the Maltese judiciary, government, and magistrates, in addition to all foreign consuls. But it must have included Affie and Marie as well, by private agreement, as he came in the full dress uniform of a colonel of the Black Watch, and she in evening dress, kokoshnik, a necklace of diamonds and rubies, and the contemporary Order of Victoria and Albert. At the Grand Masked Ball

closing the carnival on Shrove Tuesday, Marie was ‘unexpectedly absent, although a lady in a spire-like hat was generally mistaken for her’ (*Malta Standard* 28 February).

Some of the Maltese notabilities, visiting and resident, certainly must have thought it beneath their dignity to appear in costume, but this is unlikely to be the cause of the Edinburgh refusal on this occasion. Fritz’s state of health at this time made dressing up for silly amusement out of the question and a more restrained outfit necessary. Fritz had developed symptoms consistent with malignant cancer of the throat the previous March, which was diagnosed as such on 18 May by two of his six German doctors who advised him to undergo a laryngectomy. Vicky refused to accept the diagnosis and asked for a second opinion. Bismarck, allowing international specialists to be sought, prompted the German doctors to sound out the British authority on diseases of the throat, Morell Mackenzie, who had founded the Hospital for Diseases of the Throat and Chest at 32 Golden Square in 1863 and where he had steadily built up a considerable reputation. Mackenzie arrived and performed a biopsy on Monday 21, sending the section to the celebrated Viennese pathologist and politician Rudolf Virchow; but the section was too small for him to be certain, so he requested a larger one, which Mackenzie duly sent. Virchow now replied that the section was benign.

At a time of widespread uncertainty in the diagnosis of malignant tumours, common sense should have prompted Mackenzie to take the position that it would be preferable for him to be safe rather than sorry and press for the full operation. But because Virchow’s opinion coincided with his own he did not, and he succeeded in persuading Fritz and Vicky to abandon plans to remove the larynx, an awkward but potentially life-saving operation. According to Mackenzie, the tumour was certainly benign and treatable by other means, and this is what Vicky chose to believe. Mackenzie returned to London a hero, to be knighted on 2 September at Fritz’s request following the imperial couple’s visit to the Golden Jubilee.

But on Fritz’s return to Germany, his condition steadily deteriorated. Mackenzie was recalled, arriving at San Remo on the Ligurian coast to where Fritz had repaired with Vicky, on 6 November, to consult with the team of three resident German doctors and to finally admit the true nature of Fritz’s condition, leaving eight days later. Affie and Marie left for Leghorn on Thursday 22 March 1888, going on from there to San Remo where they were shocked by what they saw. Fritz had been reduced to a voiceless invalid who was virtually unable to breathe and in constant pain. He had been given the choice of a laryngectomy – which necessarily involved a tracheotomy first – or the palliative of a tracheotomy alone. Foolishly perhaps, Fritz had chosen the latter (9 February), although it is unlikely that excision of the cancerous larynx would have saved him at this late stage. Affie and Marie were not permitted to stay long and so left in order to collect Liko from Florence and return with him to Malta on Thursday 5 April. The operation appeared to give Fritz some hope although it was of course an entirely illusory one, and when Wilhelm I died on 9 March, Fritz succeeded him for just ninety-nine days before his own death at Potsdam on Friday 15 June. However, Marie would not be present for Fritz’s funeral as his death coincided with the second protracted cruise of the *Surprise*.

Meanwhile, there was Liko to entertain at dinner (10 April) and also Loosy and Lorne again, who had arrived in Marie’s absence and would leave on Saturday 21. On Monday 7 May, about one hundred persons were invited to San Antonio for an amateur theatrical performance of two ephemeral farces, but in which the ‘acting was of the highest order ... the costumes were tactful and elegant’ (*Malta Standard* 8 May). On the following day, Affie and Marie threw a spectacular late afternoon garden party at San Antonio that included a special train set to run from La Valetta

along the existing but not much used railway line. Lasting for two hours from 4:30, it was 'largely and fashionably attended' by about 500 guests. The royal hosts 'were untiring in their exertions to make their guests as comfortable as possible ... [it was] the most enjoyable and generally successful [event] of its kind of recent years held in this delightful residence', according to the *Malta Times* (11 May).

The second cruise, this time exploring the Western Mediterranean basin, included Affie and Georgie but again not Marie's children who would be sent on to Coburg where she would meet up with them in July. The *Surprise* set sail for the Balearic Islands and Barcelona in the afternoon of Sunday 13 May, with Affie leaving at the same time aboard the *Alexandra*. Marie found Port Mahón on Menorca 'charming' while the island itself was 'very pretty and wonderfully green ... but ... no costumes to be seen'. Curiously, and in contradistinction to many contemporary and future aesthetes, she thought Barcelona 'not an interesting town' although it was 'very fine and clean'. However, she was most impressed by the Rambla de Catalunya and the lesser ramblas – the unique series of long boulevards connecting Portal de la Pau to the Plaça de Catalunya with their 'beautiful trees'.<sup>26</sup>

The *Surprise* then steamed down the Catalanian and Spanish coastlines directly to Tunis. 'I was much interested to visit Africa for the first time', she wrote. It was:

most picturesque ... the native population walks about ... noiselessly, beautifully draped mostly in white, sometimes in large coloured cloaks. They are very fine, very dignified ... We went to the bazaar and also into an Arab house where we saw some Arab women, small graceful and rather pretty ... one sees a great many black men from the Sudan and some of them are really handsome.<sup>27</sup>

The *Surprise* docked at Gibraltar on 25 May for a few days before arriving at Málaga early in the morning of Sunday 10 June. After a day in the Andalusian capital, the party sailed up to Alicante the following morning. In the afternoon, the entire party disembarked and took the train to Madrid, arriving on Tuesday evening after a very primitive journey without either water (Marie complained that she had wanted to wash but could not) or proper food. Moreover, between Córdoba and Granada a quantity of jewellery was stolen from the train, thought at first to belong to Marie but which in fact belonged to one of her ladies. Affie made a strong complaint to the governor of the province, but the stolen items were never recovered.

Once in Madrid, however, Marie took her usual deep interest in local culture. Bourke wrote Missy a few days later astonished at her energy whilst sightseeing: 'You know how strong the Duchess is and how impossible it is to tire her. I think the Infanta must have heard of this and it seemed to be a trial which should be worn out first, but I can tell you it was more than the Infanta could do to tire your Mamma'.<sup>28</sup> The entire afternoon was spent in the Prado Museum of Fine Art, containing one of the world's greatest collections of paintings accumulated by the Habsburg and Bourbon kings of Spain during the course of three centuries.

The party left Madrid the next morning in a special train bound for Toledo, which was reached at noon. There they visited the Fábrica de Armas, from which the party was given marvellous specimens of knives and engraved metalwork to take away, as well as the Hispanic Gothic cathedral begun in the thirteenth century and completed under Ferdinand and Isabella. They took the evening train back to Madrid, arriving on the following Thursday morning and spending the day at the unrivalled collection of historical arms and armour at the old palace situated on the Plaza de Armas, following this by a tour of the royal stables. In the evening, Affie and Marie were entertained by Sir Francis Ford, the British ambassador at Madrid since the previous year who had been secretary to the embassy at St Petersburg in 1871. On Friday, news began to

arrive that Fritz was near death, so Affie remained in the Palacio Real on the Plaza de Armas while Marie and the rest of the group went on a tour of the Escorial, built by Philip II twenty-five miles northwest of the capital. When the party returned to Madrid in the late afternoon it was to the news that Fritz had died. All further festivities were cancelled, but once again Marie attempted to purchase some Spanish horses for Malta, the indigenous Arabs of the island being in her view too unpredictable.

On the evening of Sunday 17 June, the party left Madrid for Valencia, where it arrived the following morning. Affie rejoined the *Alexandria* while Bourke and Fortescue took Marie to Tarragona before moving on to Port Mahón on Menorca, where they met up with Affie, and then on to Palma de Mallorca. Affie then went separately to Bologna (28 June) and then Rome. On the following Saturday, the *Surprise* arrived at Marseilles and Marie made her way overland to Coburg, bringing the children a box of hand-made chocolates from Madrid and learning that prince Alfred had been appointed 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant *à la suite* in the 6<sup>th</sup> Thuringian Regiment. She arrived at the ducal summer home of Schloss Rosenau just outside Coburg on Saturday 7 July, remaining there for six weeks before returning to the Palais Edinburg, Affie's official Coburg residence, on Tuesday 21 August. Affie was on duty and could not join them, but Countess Tolstaia visited Marie for several weeks after the return to Coburg. On 5 October, Marie left for Malta with her daughters, travelling via Munich, Rome, and Naples, which they reached three days later, happily with the cholera scare over. After two days in Naples, Bourke came in the *Surprise* to take them to La Valetta where they docked early in the morning of Friday 12, two days after Affie had returned with the squadron. 'The ramparts and fortifications were crowded by large numbers of the population', noted the *Malta Standard* (12 October); clearly for the Maltese, Marie's presence among them had not lost any of its novelty.

On the way back from Naples, the *Surprise* had spent a day in Syracuse in Sicily in order to see the celebrated Greek fortifications and the theatre hewn out of the rocky coast. Marie described the visit when she returned to San Antonio:

The journey from Naples to Syracuse was excellent and the children enjoyed it immensely, all the charm of the South flowed over us and the waxing moon (which I viewed on my right side – a superstition I hold) made the sea even more beautiful. At 9 o'clock in the morning we were in the district of Syracuse to show the children the interesting ruins from antiquity. But what amused them more was to clamber from rock to rock in the intense heat, and to devour grapes and pomegranates.

In one of those places that one goes to see, we came across a solid German from Königsberg who had set himself up as a farmer and insisted on speaking [to us in] execrable Italian. The contrast was very amusing, and I saw him stuff the children's pockets with fruit without asking for a sou – we being all the more surprised by this as we were in a country where nobody offers you even a glass of water without thrusting out a hand. In the afternoon we took our tea, my second daughter and several officers making up a picnic in the middle of the ruins of a Greek fortress! You would have been scared to death at seeing the children scaling all the walls like goats; baby was looked after by one of the young officers, a great friend of the children, who performed incredible feats for her, finishing by clambering up a tree with her. The warden of the ruins, who was a marvellous man, reckoned that there are no children like English or German ones for knowing how to amuse themselves in this way, so much so that when some young Italian ladies of quality shrieked when attempting to climb even the lower small rocks, he imitated their screeches, which made me laugh heartily!<sup>29</sup>

October had been exceptionally warm even for the Mediterranean, and the day after the arrival the children were in the sea rather than on it, there being no lessons that day as it was Prince Alfred's fourteenth birthday, making 15 October a holiday for the family. Affie, whose naval duties prevented him from spending much time with his

children, was with them on this occasion in the sea, helping Baby Bee to learn how to swim while Marie looked on: ‘The Duke is flourishing and in an excellent frame of mind’.<sup>30</sup>

Wednesday 17 October was Marie’s 35<sup>th</sup> birthday, and it was marked publicly with a parade down Strada Reale – the principal street of La Valetta – with British and Russian flags, bands playing, and general gaiety continuing well into the night. A naval review was held on the parade ground at Corradino Hill near the port, and after inspecting the sailors Marie opened the new recreation hall with a special silver key inscribed ‘R.N. Parade and Recreation Ground, Malta, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1887’.

Marie was soon off again aboard the *Surprise*, leaving for Greece on Wednesday 24 October, visiting the islands and reaching Athens on 8 November. Three days earlier, at the Piræus, she had joined King George and Queen Olga who were entertained to a dinner aboard the *Alexandra*, which had arrived there that day with Affie. The *Alexandra* then returned to Malta, arriving on Tuesday 13, while the *Surprise* lingered a little, returning on Saturday 17.

With Affie’s three-year position at Malta drawing to a close, so too were all the arrangements connected with the *Surprise*, and Marie was determined that Fortescue’s loyalty and efficiency would not go unrewarded. On 8 August, she had written Victoria:

I am sure you will not mind my mentioning the name of a naval officer for the autumn nominations to the yacht. It is the 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant of the *Surprise*, Fortescue, who is very, *comme il faut*, clever and pleasant, and a very good officer ... We are all very fond of him and I would feel so happy if I could help in any way ... as he would always do credit to the service ... he is the son of Lord Fortescue and quite a man of the best society. As a rule, I never like asking favours, but I take a great interest in the navy and have many friends amongst the service.<sup>31</sup>

Seymour Fortescue had entered the navy in 1869, serving during the Egyptian crisis of 1882 and at Suakin three years later following the death of General Gordon. He was the second son of Earl Fortescue, several times Whig member of Parliament, an inspector of hospitals in the Crimea, secretary to the Poor Law Board under the first administration of Lord John Russell, and latterly a vigorous liberal unionist – in other words, Marie’s type of politician. As far as the son was concerned, the feeling was very much mutual:

The Duchess herself ... was, and is, a very remarkable woman ... she certainly succeeded ... in making herself extremely popular with the Naval Officers at Malta. The dinners at San Antonio were infinitely more agreeable and less stiff than the sorts of entertainments which were generally given at the various Admiralty Houses ... and a command to dine there was not only an honour but a very distinct pleasure into the bargain.<sup>32</sup>

Fortescue subsequently attained the rank of commander and became naval aide-de-camp to Lord Roberts during the Boer War. He recalled how his career had been launched:

In early September [1888], I heard, to my great joy, that I had been appointed to the Royal Yacht ‘Victoria and Albert’. This meant not only certain promotion at the end of two years, but also a very pleasant time in England.<sup>33</sup>

In the finest tradition of genuine benevolence, Fortescue probably never knew – although he may have guessed – who had been behind his nomination. Marie’s petition had met with a favourable response, and she was grateful to the queen: ‘I was

so thankful to see that my protégé Fortescue had been appointed to the yacht and must thank you very sincerely for it'.<sup>34</sup>

Marie then successfully petitioned Victoria for herself and her family. Affie's position in the Mediterranean was due to come to an end on 25 February 1889:

What I particularly regret is that Alfred cannot stay in his command till April ... [and] will probably have to leave Malta at the end of February ... I suppose you could not ... influence the Admiralty in that respect? It only means postponing the arrival of the new Admiral for a month, but would really be a great boon to us, as we could then all return straight to London.<sup>35</sup>

Victoria could and did influence the Admiralty, now administered by Earl Spencer, Gladstone's first lord retained by Salisbury during his third administration for his anti-Gladstonian shipbuilding programme.

However, Marie then changed her mind and her plans. She and the children would go to Germany while Affie would travel directly to London aboard the *Alexandra*. It is not known precisely why she did this, although her excuse to Victoria was that for the whole family and staff to stay at Cannes while waiting for the *Osborne* would be 'too expensive'.<sup>36</sup> In any event, she told her that they were all 'very sorry that our time here has come to an end ... [and] that Alfred has to remain quite alone here for the next 6 weeks, but he has always plenty of work to do and plenty to occupy him'.<sup>37</sup> We are unfortunately left to wonder what Affie may have thought about these alterations that now obliged him to remain behind.

Marie was certainly much like her Victorian contemporaries where Christmas was concerned; perhaps even more so for being Teutonically inclined. Christmas for the Edinburghs was as Dickensian as the annual special December supplements of the *Illustrated London News*, and included all the quaint customs now so familiar to the world and which Prince Albert had introduced in the 1840s. It was always an extremely important family occasion for Marie, and as Christmas 1888 would be their last on Malta, she was particularly keen to make it memorable for everyone with a splendid tree and full decorations that had to be brought in from England and Germany. At one point, she worried that not everything would arrive on time. 'I have experienced terrible anguish, because the courier did not arrive until yesterday', she wrote Countess Tolstaia on Boxing Day, 'and still I have been waiting for several things in order to complete our arrangements for the Christmas tree. But happily everything was ready on time and the success was complete'.<sup>38</sup>

However successful their last Maltese Christmas had been, the three years on their Mediterranean island came to an end under some unfortunate administrative circumstances. Simmons, not exactly enchanted by the new political arrangement on the island, had made a dignified exit as governor in March 1888, and his replacement, Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Torrens, was a somewhat less sympathetic figure with whom Marie was unable to establish the harmonious relationship she had had with his predecessor. She invited him to a dinner on 26 November, which he reciprocated on 5 December. On 17 January 1889, Torrens threw a dance at the governor's palace that Marie attended, and this was the extent of their meetings in the last months of her stay. But it may be conjectured that in spite of what Marie had written to Victoria, three years on an island of 122 square miles had been quite enough for her, and the new situation simply marked the termination of the old familiar atmosphere.

It did not mark the end of her other social events, however. On Monday 21 January, there was a naval ball at the Theatre Royal to give thanks to the sailors of Malta who had done so much for Marie during her stay. There were over one thousand guests, and Marie wore a sea-green dress with a cream brocade front with pink flowers,

ornaments, diamonds, and pearls, as well as a spectacular (Western-style) tiara. 'Champagne ... flowed like water', observed the *Malta Standard* (22 January), adding that 'a pleasant retreat for those who will not find happiness in marriage was arranged in the portico ... [where] tobacco and good spirit did their best to warm the chilly air'. Lorne and Loosy were once again present when on the following Monday and the Monday after that were held two parties at Admiralty House that had been postponed from the previous year on the news of the death of Alexander von Hesse (4 December).

On Wednesday 20 February 1889, Marie and her daughters left Malta for the last time. 'The route through Valetta ... to the Customs House was lined by the troops ... who presented arms', noted the *Malta Standard* (22 February). 'We give expression', it continued, 'to the feelings of all the people of Malta, in wishing Her Royal and Imperial Highness and family every happiness and prosperity. The people will long retain pleasant reminiscences of her stay on these shores'.

With Bourke commanding the *Surprise*, they took a last short cruise visiting Athens, Palermo, Syracuse, and finally Naples where they visited Pompeii, since the children had missed this pleasure at the time of their quarantine. At Naples they bade farewell to Bourke and travelled overland to Coburg via Geneva and Berlin, arriving on 10 March. While in Berlin, Marie had met Bismarck again, with whom she 'had a long and interesting talk ... about politics in general'. She also had an interview with Edward Malet, British ambassador in Berlin since 1884, whom she found to be 'a pleasant and clever man'.<sup>39</sup> She left Berlin on 9 April.

It was shortly after arriving in Coburg that Marie received some distressing news from Malta concerning the *Sultan*. Affie had written to tell her that his flagship had run aground then sunk after an accident, and Marie reported that he was clearly 'very sad' about the whole affair.<sup>40</sup> But worse was to come one month later when she heard that he had fallen ill. 'I felt anxious about Alfred's attack of fever, but I had a letter from his A.D.C. ... which reassured me'.<sup>41</sup> Affie's aide-de-camp while on the island was Bourke, who had been promoted to this temporary position by Marie in November 1888. Clearly, Affie had instructed Bourke to give Marie a favourable impression of his illness, as it in fact nearly cost him his life.

~ 'Maltese ... remittent fever' ~

Although a keen hunter, fisherman, and punter at the races, Affie had neither the physique nor the temperament to be a sportsman in the conventional sense. However, he did enjoy either watching or even playing the occasional gentle cricket match. The first division team from the Maltese English cricket club had accompanied Affie aboard the *Surprise* for a 'friendly' against a team fielded by the English community at Constantinople during his diplomatic mission.

On that occasion Affie had been a spectator; but on Saturday 30 March 1889, he took part in a club match on the island and caught what he thought was a slight chill. He did nothing about it on the familiar assumption that if he left his condition alone it would go away, and no doubt exacerbated it by giving what the *Malta Standard* described (2 April) as 'a very successful orchestral concert' at the Union Club by the band of the *Alexandra* later that evening. Needless to say the condition did not go away. Since 20 February, Affie had been living at Admiralty House on his own in rooms set aside for his use as naval duties prior to his relinquishing his position were such that he was required to be at La Valetta rather than San Antonio. Unfortunately, with Marie, her children, and her staff all gone, this meant that Affie had no one about him to comment on his condition or encourage treatment. Then, on Friday 5 April, there was a grand dinner at Admiralty House for the reception of Affie's successor, which with its excessive overindulgence in food and drink felled him at once. Feeling febrile and enervated, he immediately took to his bed and did not leave it.

Mediterranean Fleet-Surgeon George McLean, assigned to the *Alexandra*, was called in by the admiralty on Wednesday 10. He found Affie in bed with a fluctuating temperature never falling below 101° and reaching a high of 103·8°, with further symptoms of headaches, severe vertigo, lumbosacral backache, prostration, and a lightly coated dry tongue. McLean also found Affie extremely depressed at the recent wrecking of the *Sultan* (a mental condition not calculated to aid recovery), and he recommended that Affie leave Malta at once aboard the *Alexandra* where he could treat him on the journey back to England. Unfortunately, Affie took only part of this advice, boarding the *Alexandra* on Friday 12 for a three-day cruise in Sicilian waters. Both newspapers reported that Affie was suffering from 'a chill', but it was clearly far more serious than that. And when Affie at last took McLean's advice, leaving Malta at 3:15 in the afternoon of Tuesday 16 April,<sup>42</sup> *The Malta Times* (19 April) announced that he had been 'too indisposed to receive any farewell visits'.

George McLean had qualified at the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh in 1862, becoming an undistinguished physician who would prove to be a better administrator in his subsequent capacity as inspector general of the navy's medical department. The fact that McLean did not remain in practising medicine throughout his working life is probably revealing. Also perhaps significant is the fact that he chose to be a ship's doctor in the first place – before modern times a career always and thoroughly regarded both in theory and in practice as the lowest grade to which a physician may aspire in the medical profession.

The first course of action McLean undertook once Affie was aboard ship was to put his patient on an unwholesome and malnourishing diet: strong clear soup every three hours, egg with Spanish brandy, tapioca pudding, milk and soda, and a glass of whisky at night. McLean's medication had of course begun on the day he had first visited Affie at Admiralty House where he began Affie's treatment by administering to him three doses of antipyrine, a bitter white crystalline powder used as an analgesic and antipyretic; it was highly toxic with the possibility of acute or chronic poisoning

developing with prolonged use. Each night before Affie went to sleep he was also given twenty grams of ammonium bromide, a central nervous system depressant promoting ataxia, vertigo, mental confusion, and drowsiness with overuse. As Affie's treatment continued, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand McLean's system and what diagnosis he had made, since he did not name Affie's condition nor give his reasons for adopting the peculiar method of treatment.

On Sunday 14 April, while at sea off Etna, Affie suffered what McLean described as 'a severe paroxysm of coughing followed by considerable dyspnea in which skin of face and neck became deeply congested. Wheezing respiration and dry rhonci audible over upper and front part of the chest'.<sup>43</sup> It took two days for Affie to recover from this attack, during which time his diet had been reduced to milk soup and whisky soda, while he had a temperature of 102°. On Saturday 20, Affie was finally allowed one soft-boiled egg with a slice of buttered bread after he had virtually begged McLean for some solid food. Two days later, while the *Alexandra* was coaling at Gibraltar, Affie was allowed some sole for breakfast followed by 'chlorate of potash spray and sol[ution] of cocaine' for his sore throat.<sup>44</sup> Chlorate of potash (potassium chlorate) was an explosive soluble white crystalline substance used for treating pharyngitis and stomatitis, its use eventually discontinued as it destroyed red blood cells with prolonged use leading to diarrhoea and vomiting. Cocaine was at that time widely employed as a local anaesthetic, even when its toxic and addictive properties were fully appreciated.

While still anchored at Gibraltar, Affie sent Marie a telegram trying to reassure her, explaining that although he was still very weak he was feeling much better. Marie expressed her fears to Victoria, assessing accurately the nature of McLean's treatment:

But ... Malta fever lasts a long time and I have seen no end of examples, Louis Battenberg ... who never got rid of it until he was some time in Germany ... [Alfred] gets very nervous about himself even during the slightest ailment ... And then he cannot take quinine, which is really the only effective remedy ... I had it myself at Sorrento [1873] with a temperature of over 102 and was only cured by big doses ... then I do not trust the naval doctors and am afraid that they have allowed him to get too low ... on a lowering diet.<sup>45</sup>

By Wednesday 24, Affie had become so agitated by this collection of curious stimulants and depressants that he had to be given draughts of morphine to induce sleep.

Seeing at least that his first system was ineffective, on Thursday 25 McLean changed Affie's medication to the following: 'sodium bicarbonate' (baking powder: a white, odourless saline alkali taken orally as an antacid); 'tincture of nucis vomitum' (*nux vomica*: seed derived from an Asian tree used in the production of poisoned arrows and harmful 'magic potions' containing toxic alkaloids such as indole strychnine and its analogue Brucine, two milligrams of which are sufficient to kill an adult, with smaller doses inducing aphrodisia and psychedelia); 'spirit of chloroform' (a powerful cardiac and circulatory depressant with a very small margin of safety, six times as potent as ether); 'tincture of aurant' (aurotherapy: the questionable theory of treating diseases by the administration of gold salts); and 'gentian' (the innocuous dried rhizome roots [powdered with bitter orange peel, cardamom seed, alcohol, and water] of the herbaceous plant *Gentiana lutea*, used for many centuries as a minor topical anti-infective and also for the stimulation of the alimentary tract).

McLean stated that he began this new method at nine o'clock in the morning, observing that Affie suffered a second severe paroxysm at noon that lasted for two

hours and forty minutes, with again a temperature of 102°. Fortunately for Affie, the *Alexandra* arrived at Portsmouth in the late afternoon of Saturday 27 April; he may well have thanked God that he had not been born an American or he would have arrived at New York as stiff as one of his flagship's masts. Nevertheless, Affie was considered unfit to leave his vessel, and it remained anchored at Southsea until he could be moved ashore. Meanwhile, Victoria had sent Sir Oscar Clayton, Affie's surgeon-in-ordinary, to Portsmouth where McLean passed him his ship notes so that he could take over Affie's treatment. Clayton was a fashionable court physician who had diagnosed Bertie's typhoid in 1871 and had been knighted on 30 November 1882 for his services to the royal family. But back on 12 September 1874, 'Ape' (Carlo Pellegrini) had satirized him in *Vanity Fair* in an anti-portrait titled 'Fashionable Surgery' in which Clayton the dandy merely played at being a physician. The subject – as usual in *Vanity Fair* – was not quite named, but the entire nation knew it was Clayton.

Back in Coburg, Marie had decided to leave early, on Friday 26 April, leaving her daughters behind but taking Prince Alfred with her. They travelled by the most direct overland route to Calais and then by ship to Dover and then from Dover to Southsea, making astonishing time and arriving just four hours after Affie. They dined on board the *Alexandra* with him, discussing Affie's condition with McLean and Clayton, then spent the night at Admiralty House while Affie remained in his cabin. On Sunday morning, Clayton considered Affie fit enough to leave for London, *The Times* on the following day describing him as having looked 'very pale and haggard, but ... able to walk without support' from his ship to the special train arranged through the offices of the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway. At 10:15, the Edinburghs and suite left the dockyard for Victoria Station, arriving at Clarence House three hours later where Marie immediately wrote Victoria: 'He looks naturally weak ... His appetite is very good and he complains of hunger and of being kept only on slops'.<sup>46</sup>

A few days after Affie's arrival at Clarence House, a medical bulletin was issued in a leading professional journal:

Since his arrival at Clarence House he has had a sharp exacerbation of the fever [99.2°], which was only to be anticipated, as the Maltese type of remittent fever is of very uncertain duration, but not infrequently lasts fully six weeks ... Sir Oscar Clayton has been able to give an absolutely favourable prognosis as to ultimate recovery.<sup>47</sup>

On 2 May, Victoria drove to Clarence House 'where Marie received me, taking me into the sitting-room downstairs to see Affie. He was looking very ill and very thin, and seemed very feeble and his voice very weak'.<sup>48</sup>

It would be no exaggeration to say that by this time Marie was furious. She travelled to Windsor Castle a few days later to give Victoria a first-hand report on Affie's progress, and while there wrote to Countess Tolstaia a blistering letter attacking both Affie's self-indulgent obsequiousness before his physicians and their incompetent and dangerous homœopathic treatments. She confessed that she had had little time to write earlier due to all the activity regarding Affie's illness that in some senses had been 'greatly exaggerated' because he was not being treated properly. Marie reckoned that Affie was 'suffering from ordinary malarial fever, without any complications ... headaches with only a moderate temperature. But thanks to the abominable treatment of the English doctors he is unable to put himself right'. As she continued to write, she became increasingly angered by the whole business. Affie was being treated by all sorts of 'horse medicines' that she reckoned were 'more barbarous than in the previous century'. Because of this she found him 'very weak', and in spite

of Clayton's favourable prognosis Affie had told her that 'he was going to die', an attitude that fuelled her anger still further. All the doctors were 'medical charlatans', but at last, at her insistence, Affie had agreed to see 'a more sensible doctor who made him eat nourishing food and take walks around the house and garden'.<sup>49</sup>

Marie had been obliged to take matters into her own hands and did not very much care whether she offended anyone, least of all the three 'medical charlatans' McLean, Clayton, and Francis Laking. Laking, the 'more sensible' of the 'charlatans', had been surgeon apothecary to Victoria since 1874 and would maintain this position under Edward VII. Probably much more importantly – at least for Marie – was the fact that Laking had graduated from Heidelberg University, the oldest university in Germany. This fact was unusual at a time when most British physicians graduated from either London or Edinburgh, and this background gave Laking a certain knowledge of German and also Continental medical practice.

But it was McLean (whose name Marie had confused with 'Mackenzie' in her letter), the 'old charlatan who for more than 20 years [in the navy] has endeavoured to ruin his [Affie's] health and whom I would not invite to treat my sick dog'. In spite of Laking being not quite as bad as Clayton and McLean, Marie still did not trust him. She preferred to take advice from the only doctor she did more-or-less trust: Botkin in St Petersburg, whom she constantly telegraphed although he was himself ill (he would die on 25 December at Menton in France). Botkin agreed with Laking, and also immediately advised her to stop the 'horse medicines' and make Affie eat properly. However, he also agreed with Marie that Affie should be made to take regular exercise, while the three doctors had advised complete bed rest in a darkened room.

Samuel Hahnemann had stumbled across his theory of homœopathy by observing that when natural quinine (discovered in 1820) was administered to a healthy individual it produced the same symptoms as malarial fever, a disease then properly treatable only through the use of quinine. Whether the extensive theory he elaborated as a result of this curious fact was justified is a moot point; but the fact that artificial quinine had been widely available since 1865 is not. Marie was familiar with the drug, and in the mistaken belief that Affie was suffering from 'ordinary malarial fever' she explained to Tolstaia that his situation was not being helped by his stubborn conviction that he could not tolerate quinine. This, she insisted, was a nonsense he insisted on reiterating whenever she suggested that he use it. It is not clear from existing records whether McLean or any other physician suggested this course of treatment only to have it rejected by the royal patient, but this seems highly unlikely given that McLean would probably have mentioned it. In any event, Marie wore away Affie's resistance with ease and she ensured that he was given a good dose of the substance – while at the same time removing the 'horse medicines' – in addition to the full regular diet and exercise. Naturally enough, Affie very soon improved. 'It's really thanks to me that he is beginning to mend, since I've had a real battle with the three imbeciles ... I have always mistrusted English doctors, but never would I have believed them to be capable of such ignorance'.<sup>50</sup>

However, Affie had not been suffering from 'ordinary malarial fever', as Marie had believed, if by this she had intended that infection induced by protozoan parasites discharged in human blood through the salivary ducts of a mosquito. He had in fact been suffering from *Brucellosis melitensis*, or undulant ('Malta') fever, caused by any one of three widespread infectious diseases brought on by nonmotile aerobic bacteria of the genus *Brucella*, one of which he had contracted through drinking the milk of an infected Maltese goat, the most common manner of infection on the island.

But, as Marie had explained to Queen Victoria, she had been influenced in both her belief and course of action by her feverish attack at Sorrento during the time of her engagement. In fact she had had another similar attack several years later while on Malta in the early spring of 1877. This had been so severe that when Lord Tankerville arrived by yacht on Monday 5 March especially to see her, she had been unable to leave her bed in order to greet him. 'I have been unwell these last days', she had written Victoria, 'a severe cold with two feverish attacks, which I dare not neglect, having suffered so severely at Naples [*i.e.* Sorrento]. I am confined to my room and find it very tiresome'. As in 1873, Marie treated herself: 'I am taking much quinine to stop the fever', she explained.<sup>51</sup> The treatment proved effective, and by April she had fully recovered.

Malta was not only an ugly island (at any rate according to Marie) but also a highly insalubrious one at that time. A lengthy correspondence between La Valetta and Tunis had taken place during the entire summer of 1887 regarding the possibility of cholera spreading to the island from Tunisia. It did spread, of course, resulting in the stranding of the children at Naples. In fact, the entire basin was unsafe, and undulant fever was also known as 'Neapolitan fever', 'Gibraltar fever', and even more generally 'Mediterranean fever' so widespread was it. However, its endemic nature on Malta made it particularly noticeable and dramatic since it could not be escaped.

There had been a great outbreak of 'cattle plague' throughout the spring of 1888, which Affie and Marie witnessed as it fell between two cruises. It was of great concern to the administration. Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, lieutenant governor of Malta and chief secretary to the government from 1884 to 1889, dealt with all the distressing effects of the numerous infectious diseases Malta suffered during Marie's stay on the island. She would have had plenty of opportunity to discuss these as Lady May Hely-Hutchinson was one of her few indigenous friends. On 24 May 1888, Hely-Hutchinson informed Thomas Sandwith, consul at Tunis since 1885, that the 'cattle plague' that had raged throughout the island (resulting in what would be called *Brucellosis abortus* in humans) 'still has not entirely disappeared as some straggling cases have occurred during the last ten days'.<sup>52</sup> Nor was this the only type of disease on Malta. On 13 August 1888, Hely-Hutchinson informed the acting consul in Tunis (Sandwith had been transferred to Odessa) that a limited outbreak of rabies had occurred on Malta after a young girl had been bitten by what he called a 'mad cat'.<sup>53</sup>

Marie's ignorance of Affie's exact condition was therefore at least understandable, since his particular infection was still waiting to be properly identified by David Bruce, the assistant professor of pathology at the Army Medical School in Netley who had first isolated the organism as recently as 1887. Nevertheless, it was not, therefore, common malaria, although the symptoms of the two distinct diseases were similar. Effective treatment of *Brucellosis* was impossible before the days of antibiotics, and the disease had to be left to run its course of anything from three to six months, trusting to the strength of the patient and the harmlessness of the medication as to whether or not death would occur. As usual, the less the physician interfered the better the chances of the patient's recovery. Marie's three 'medical charlatans' were – also as usual – trying to earn their fees with their persistent intervention, and although Marie's diagnosis had been incorrect, her method of treatment (aided by Botkin) had been essentially the best for her time. By removing the dangerous drugs and replacing them with the palliative of quinine as an antipyretic, Affie was saved. He might otherwise have expired, if not on his hypothetical way to New York then in the genuine sitting room at Clarence House.

However, now that Clayton had taken full credit for Affie's recovery, the best that he could suggest for his patient was that he take the waters at Kissingen. Marie, who had spent much of the time at Windsor with Marie Erbach when not at Clarence House, had cancelled a projected lengthy trip to Russia due to Affie's illness, but on 8 June she, Affie, and Prince Alfred finally left England for the Continent. Affie was left at Kissingen while Marie went on to Berlin. She then went to Coburg to deposit her son with his sisters before going to Russia for the marriage of her brother Pavl to Princess Alexandra of Greece ('Aline') on 4/16 June. Ten days later, as Minny 'broke down' when saying goodbye at Peterhof,<sup>54</sup> Marie returned to Coburg. She then went back to Kissingen with her daughters where they all remained until Affie felt well enough to travel. On 6 July, the medical press announced that his condition had 'so much improved that he now considers himself in the enjoyment of his usual health and strength'.<sup>55</sup> Affie celebrated his full recovery by taking his son on a courtesy visit to see Willy – now Emperor Wilhelm II – at Potsdam while Marie sent her daughters on to Coburg before making another journey to Russia, returning to Coburg on Saturday 10 August. The crisis with Affie's health over, the Edinburghs would remain in Germany for the rest of the summer.

## NOTES and REFERENCES to Chapter Five

- <sup>1</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1638, Marie to Queen Victoria 31 Oct. 1886.
- <sup>2</sup> *Marie of Romania* i 105.
- <sup>3</sup> RIG unsigned fragment 8°x 4, Malta to Coburg 3/15 Oct. 1888.
- <sup>4</sup> *Marie of Romania* i 105-7.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid. 108-10.
- <sup>6</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1476, Marie to Queen Victoria 20 Oct. 1876.
- <sup>7</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1639, Marie to Queen Victoria 4 Jan. 1887.
- <sup>8</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1484, Marie to Queen Victoria 18 Feb. 1877.
- <sup>9</sup> CAC Churchill Papers CHAR 28/46/23 Coburg to London 24 Sep. 1886.
- <sup>10</sup> CAC Churchill Papers CHAR 28/46/24, Marie to Lady Randolph Churchill 9 Nov. 1886.
- <sup>11</sup> *Marie of Romania* i 112.
- <sup>12</sup> CAC Churchill Papers CHAR 28/46/25, Malta to London.
- <sup>13</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1645, Zadar (Dalmatia) to Balmoral 26 Sep. 1887.
- <sup>14</sup> The 'Queen Victoria' was taken out of service in 1902, after which it fell into private hands and disrepair. It was purchased for the Bembridge branch of the R.N.L.I. in 1990, was carefully restored, and is now the oldest working lifeboat in Britain, although it is used only for fund raising events and display purposes. The R.N.L.I. had named two lifeboats after Affie and Marie in 1874 following their marriage. They have not survived, but two silver-mounted model replicas were presented to Affie and Marie at the Mansion House ball of 1874 on behalf of all the English residents of St Petersburg.
- <sup>15</sup> CAC Churchill Papers CHAR 28/46/25, Marie to Lady Randolph Churchill 24 Feb. 1887.
- <sup>16</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1645, Marie to Queen Victoria 26 Sep. 1887.
- <sup>17</sup> HL MS 62 MB1/U24, Marie to Countess Tolstaia 11/23 Nov. 1887.
- <sup>18</sup> *Fortescue* 157.
- <sup>19</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1646, Marie to Queen Victoria 19 Oct. 1887. Lord Randolph Churchill had been similarly confined at Messina in Sicily six months earlier, unable to travel to Naples due to an outbreak of cholera at Catania. He refused to suffer this and, receiving no help from the British consul, bribed some fishermen to take him to Reggio di Calabria under cover of darkness [*Cornwallis-West* 187-9].
- <sup>20</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 17/1762, Marie to Lorne 13 Oct. 1887.
- <sup>21</sup> *Marie of Romania* i 126.
- <sup>22</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1646, Marie to Queen Victoria 19 Oct. 1887.
- <sup>23</sup> *Marie of Romania* i 121.
- <sup>24</sup> *Cornwallis-West* 186.
- <sup>25</sup> RIG unsigned fragment 8°x 4, Malta to Coburg Nov. 1888.
- <sup>26</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1648, Marie to Queen Victoria 25 May 1888.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> *Marie of Romania* i 128.
- <sup>29</sup> RIG A.1.s. 8°x 4, Malta to [?] 3/15 Oct. 1888. In lunar folklore, it brings bad luck to look at the waxing moon either through glass or in between the branches of a tree, just as it does to see it over the left shoulder. This 'superstition' is widely held, and is not particular to Russia. It is, however, a rare admission by Marie.
- <sup>30</sup> RIG unsigned fragment 8°x 4, Malta to [?] 3/15 Oct. 1888.
- <sup>31</sup> RA VIC/ADD A 20/1650. Marie also petitioned for advancement in rank for Bourke, but his career remained static. After her departure from Malta, he took command of the ironclad warship and flagship *Victoria* (launched 9 April 1887) under Admiral Sir George Tryon, which he grounded off the coast of Western Greece on 29 January 1892. Bourke was severely reprimanded by court martial on 25 February. On 22 June 1893, his misfortune was compounded when the *Victoria* sank after colliding with the *Camperdown* off the coast of Syria with the loss of 358 lives after Tryon had given the order for the two columns of ships involved to meet without rescinding the order before the collision. Bourke was examined at the court of enquiry (17-27 July) but acquitted as Tryon, who had gone down with his ship in traditional fashion, had ensured that his full culpability had been properly recorded beforehand. These were not events conducive to advancement in the navy. Missy's remark on this was preposterous: 'Owing to the loss of his Admiral, Bourke was never quite able to clear himself, for the man who had given the fatal order was no longer there to speak, or to admit his responsibility for it, and "Captain dear's" lips were sealed, for who can accuse the dead?' [*Marie of Romania* i 135].
- <sup>32</sup> *Fortescue* 156-7.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid. 172.
- <sup>34</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1652, Coburg to Balmoral 27 Sep. 1888.
- <sup>35</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1655, Malta to Balmoral 17 Dec. 1888.

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- <sup>36</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1656, Malta to Osborne 21 Jan. 1889.
- <sup>37</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1657, Malta to Windsor Castle 17 Feb. 1889.
- <sup>38</sup> HL MS 62 MB1/U24, San Antonio Palace to [?] 26 Dec. 1888.
- <sup>39</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1660, Marie to Queen Victoria 15 Apr. 1889.
- <sup>40</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1659, Marie to Queen Victoria 17 Mar. 1889. On 6 March 1889, the *Sultan* ran aground on the rocks in the channel between Malta and its small neighbouring island of Comino. The captain gave the order to abandon ship. Subsequent attempts to haul the vessel to safety failed, and the *Sultan* sank eight days later. On 8 April, a court of enquiry reprimanded the captain for sailing too close to the rocks. At the Admiralty court held on 29 and 30 May, Affie was examined in order to determine his culpability, but he was acquitted. On 15 June, the court elected to salvage the ship and it was raised on 20 August, sailing to Malta for a refit six days later and arriving at Spithead on 23 December.
- <sup>41</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1660, Marie to Queen Victoria 15 Apr. 1889.
- <sup>42</sup> It must be noted that McLean's journal conflicts with Admiralty records. The *Journal of Admiral H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh, Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean Station 1<sup>st</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> April 1889 and during passage to Portsmouth in HM ship 'Alexandra' [PRO ADM 50/384]* stated that the *Alexandra* sailed from Malta at 3:15 p.m. on Tuesday 16 April (as did both the *Malta Standard* and *The Malta Times and United Service Gazette*). McLean confused the start of Affie's three-day cruise with that of his final departure. However, both accounts agree that the ship was at Gibraltar for coaling by noon on Sunday 21 where it remained docked until Monday 22, and they are consistent thereafter.
- <sup>43</sup> WLHUM MS 7105 (3) 2/2.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* (3) 3/5.
- <sup>45</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1661, Coburg to Windsor Castle 23 Apr. 1889.
- <sup>46</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1662, Clarence House to Windsor Castle 28 Apr. 1889.
- <sup>47</sup> *British Medical Journal* 4 May 1889, 1 (Jan-Jun) 1010.
- <sup>48</sup> LQV III i 498.
- <sup>49</sup> HL MS 62 MB1/U24, Windsor Castle to St Petersburg 8 May 1889.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1485, Malta to Windsor Castle 6 Mar. 1877.
- <sup>52</sup> PRO FO 335/168/7 (10307).
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* (10925). The girl was immediately sent to the Pasteur Clinic in Naples, and the outbreak was brought under control.
- <sup>54</sup> RA VIC/Add. A 20/1664, Marie to Queen Victoria 26 Jun. 1889.
- <sup>55</sup> *British Medical Journal* 1889, 2 (Jul-Dec) 24.