

B

Class B.

P.R.
D.R. ALEXANDER, CR 446

"MERLANDS."

DE BURG PR.

AGE. 15 yrs. [REDACTED]

BANSTEAD.

SURREY.

"Choose any two countries of the Commonwealth, discuss how they differ and what they have in common."

MALTA.

Ovid. Fasti III
567-8.
Near barren Cosyra lies the fruitful isle of Malta, against which there breaks the wave of the Libyan sea."

CYPRUS.

Disraeli.
"Land famous in all ages . . . the rosy realm of Venus, the romantic Kingdom of the Crusades."

While hundreds of square miles of forest covered Cyprus' mountain slopes and her rich copper deposits lay as yet untouched, some 930 miles to the west pre-historic man struggled on the tiny island of Malta to build such great temples as the Hypogeum at Hal Saflieni, now one of the wonders of the world. Here were two islands in the same sea, on almost the same latitude, only a short distance apart, (by modern standards), different in so many ways, yet their destinies were to be so alike.

Geographically the two islands contrast vividly. The Maltese archipelago consists of Malta, Gozo and Comino, together with three uninhabited islets, and is situated at an equal distance from the east and west sides of the Mediterranean. Out of a total area of only 122 square miles for the whole group, Malta itself has an area of 95 square miles. Considering that Cyprus has an

overall area just a little bigger than that of Norfolk and Suffolk, and that this area is twenty-nine times that of Malta, it can be seen that Malta is a very small place. Cyprus consists of two mountain ranges, the southern one culminating in the 6,400 foot peak of Mt. Olympus — the highest point in the island. The two ranges are divided by the broad plain of Mesaoria, which stretches right across the island. Compared with Cyprus Malta is almost flat. Despite rather high sea-cliffs and some low-lying hills in the west, the highest point in the island is only a little more than 800 feet.

The climates of the two islands are remarkably alike — a mean average annual temperature of about 66°F , and a mean maximum of 77° and mean minimum of 55° , are common to both Cyprus and Malta. However, in Cyprus, as might be expected from a country of such a mountainous nature, the temperatures vary from place to place, and snow is seen every winter on the Olympian peaks where the temperatures are much lower, whilst in Malta snow is seen only once or twice in a generation.

The vegetation of Malta is rather scanty, although the number of trees has greatly increased in the last five years. There are few local birds, but many varied species pass over during the migratory period, 206 species having been enumerated. The flora and fauna of Cyprus are, with a few exceptions, the same as those of the neighbouring coasts of Syria and Asia Minor. Although the forests are much depleted they still cover a large area and contain a mixture of conifers and hardwoods. The moufflon, or Cyprus sheep, is most interesting but is very scarce. The mules, like those of Malta, are of excellent quality and became well-known and trusted in the Crimean War. Goats are still amongst the pests of the island, ^{but} and the disastrous visits of swarms of locusts have been controlled.

These few facts give some idea of the difference in size, relief and vegetation between the two islands as well as

their similarity in climate. Now we shall see how their positions in the Mediterranean influenced both their histories in much the same way.

Malta has been described as the magnet or nerve-centre of the Mediterranean. Being in the middle of the Mediterranean it has first been influenced by one side only to be absorbed by the other. Almost every Mediterranean civilization has left its mark on Malta. Similarly Cyprus has been described as:

Sir Harry Luke

"a land of such antiquity, of such diversity of experience: a land placed by geography at the cross-roads of the civilizations of Europe, Asia and ancient Egypt."

When mythology has been replaced by historical fact we find that Cyprus' cosmopolitan character gradually takes shape. From Crete and Mycenae in the West, Cilicia and Phoenicia in the north and east and Egypt in the south, came something of the cultures, arts and languages of lands of three continents. In the fifteenth century B.C. the great Egyptian Pharaoh, Tethmesis III, conquered the island. Some 900 years later (569 B.C.) another Egyptian King conquered Cyprus and for a long time the Egyptian influence was strong until at last greedy Rome annexed the island in 58 B.C. Then followed many confused years. Some 1200 years were yet to pass before Richard Coeur de Lion ruled the country and some six centuries of Turkish rule before Cyprus was officially annexed to the British Crown in 1914.

In much the same way Malta has had a long, varied and rather confused history. A highly developed Bronze Age culture followed the early neolithic man until in the eighth century B.C. the Phoenicians were at the height of their power and prosperity. Then followed the Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, Goths and Arabs until Count Roger of Normandy came and wrested Malta from their sway. Later came the glorious period of the Knights of St. John until, at last, in 1813, Malta was annexed to Great Britain.

The histories of Malta and Cyprus seem very similar

in design. Yet there is one fundamental and most important difference. Although the Maltese have a very mixed ancestry, they are a nation unto themselves - a race different from any other. The foreigners who came to Malta's shores settled and inter-married. Likewise many races settled on Cyprus - but there was little fusion. Cyprus is a land where races have always met yet have rarely mingled, a land that even now has three official languages, written until recently in three different scripts. It is this fact that has made the two islands so very different.

Malta's population of about 324,000 spread over only 122 square miles makes Malta one of the most densely populated units in the world. Although the area of Cyprus is twenty-nine times that of Malta, her population is not even twice as large. About four fifths of this population is Greek and one fifth Turkish, together with a smattering of Armenians, Maronites and others. Although Malta is now Roman Catholic, and the Greeks in Cyprus are members of an independent branch of the Orthodox Eastern Church whilst the Turks are Moslems, both islands were originally converted to Christianity by the Apostle Paul. Educational facilities are adequate in both islands, education from the ages of six to fourteen being free and compulsory. However there is a lack of postsecondary education in both Malta and Cyprus, and it is perhaps due to this fact that there has been such a lack of good national leaders.

Both Cyprus' and Malta's chief occupation is Agriculture although both countries suffer from lack of water. Malta is lucky in having layers of impervious blue clay between almost horizontal beds of limestone. This geological structure gives rise to a number of springs. Apart from these there are no other sources of water, there being no rivers or natural lakes. The presence of phosphates accounts for the fertility of the shallow soil, so that two, and often three, crops are raised in one year. There is hardly any modern machine farming as the tiny farms are too small to justify it. Wheat, barley and

vegetables are the main crops whilst grapes are extensively cultivated (so well, in fact, that a Naval Chaplain of the seventeenth century recounts 'Here wee have excellent wine for 3d. a quart'!), some of the best oranges in the world are grown and Maltese bees produce some of the finest honey in the world. Cyprus' main difficulty is ^{the} lack of water. Because of the rash felling of trees by ancient shipwrights, the great plain of Mesaoria is largely barren and the roaring torrents of the wet season become mere trickles in the dry, while the low lying land is often flooded leaving behind a deposit of either stones or rich alluvial earth. (Extensive schemes for reafforestation and irrigation are now in progress.) As a result of the wide range of soils, temperatures and rainfalls, the crops are of great variety - wheat, barley, oats, cotton, tobacco, flax and oranges being only a few examples. The two islands are alike in that both their main occupations are agriculture but there the likeness ends, the Cypriot farming being on a much larger and more varied scale as might be expected from a much larger country.

As for other occupations, Malta has a wide variety of small industries to supply local demands whilst both the Dockyard and the building industry employ a large proportion of the people. Cyprus has long been famed for its copper deposits, the word Cyprus having given copper its name, and mining has again lately become a great economic asset to the island, mineral production also including iron pyrites and asbestos. Both Malta and Cyprus have long been famous for lace making, whilst in Cyprus women still turn out pots and earthenware jars at amazing speed on the potter's wheel of 3,000 years ago.

Although Cyprus has always had more exports than Malta, the lack of natural harbours has always been one of the island's greatest difficulties. No harbour in Cyprus could even remotely compare with all the strength and magnificence of the harbour at Valletta, the capital of Malta, - a city which Sir Walter Scott compared to a dream, Disraeli styled

a city of palaces, and Napoleon and Nelson both called "the greatest stronghold in Europe." Valletta is indeed very different from Nicosia which, unlike the capitals of most islands, lies inland. Although described as 'a little sister of Damascus,' Nicosia has become full of all the honors of modern civilization. Garish ultra-modern cinemas and blocks of flats jar the beauty of the graceful minarets of St. Sophia and other ancient edifices.

We have seen how the two islands differ in geography, in their capitals, in the type of people, in religion and in many other ways, and we have also seen their similarity in climate, position, the occupation of the people and their histories. Now we shall see how their later histories compare in light of what has gone before.

During the last war Malta suddenly found herself one of Great Britain's most important outposts. For months she stood alone, braving the might of Hitler's Luftwaffe and the Regia Aeronautica. Wounded and starving - an outpost of freedom - Malta refused to be brought to her knees. So in April, 1942, King George VI awarded the George Cross "to the island fortress of Malta - its people and defenders." In comparison, apart from a limited number of air-raids, Cyprus remained immune from axis attack throughout the war. It was not until the withdrawal of troops from the Suez that Cyprus, like Malta, suddenly became of great strategic value to Britain. So it can be seen that right up to the present day the histories of the two islands have been very similar. Maltese public feeling is torn between the natural longing for independence and the ties, economic and otherwise, which have held Malta for some 160 years to Britain. In Cyprus the trouble is very similar. All the patriotic instincts of the Greek population for Enosis have been stunted up by the Greek Church leaders while their economic ties are British. Both islands realize what they would lose by leaving Britain. Very rarely does a Greek emigrant go to Greece, but

Thousands have come to Britain. Comparatively speaking it is only a very few people that caused the four years of tragic rioting.

So there the situation remains. Both islands suddenly became very important to Britain and recently both countries have, quite naturally, been striving for independence.

Right from mythological times when Odysseus visited Malta, and Gozo was the home of Calypso,

Byron

... think upon Calypso's isles

Endeared by days gone by,
whilst in Cyprus Venus, goddess of love, rose out of the sea off the coast of Old Paphos,

Euripides's
Bacchae.

Aphrodite's home in the soft sea-foam,
would I could wend to thee,

up to the present day, the destinies of Malta and Cyprus have been so alike. Yet however these two islands differ, in whatever ways they are the same, they are one, bound together in the might of Britain's Commonwealth.

APPROX. 1,870 words.

Books Referred To.

'Malta' by Sir Harry Luke.

'Cyprus' by Sir Harry Luke

The Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Chamber's Encyclopaedia.

'Facts on Malta', issued by the Maltese Government Tourist Board.

'Ten years of development in Cyprus', produced by the Public Information Office, Government of Cyprus.