

Motto:—

"δὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔργοντι ἄλλων"
 [Ever to be premier trick all others]

G. +10

Well written
 good piece
 some summary.
 No. 2 of N.

History and Importance of the Present

Mediterranean Possessions of Great Britain.

The name Mediterranean is by no means out of date: although that sea is no longer a Roman lake, it is, so to speak, the common Forum or ἀγορά of all the great European nations that arose out of the Roman civilisation, and forms the medium of communication between them and the many dominions they have acquired in the East and Africa. The New World is comparatively simple as regards the occupation of its various divisions; there the nations are self-contained and stand clear of each other, with breathing-room and free space to wield their arms; in the Old World, on the other hand, all the important nations, though they have their head office, as it were, in Europe, have branches in Asia, Africa and Australasia, like the nobles of Henry II, who were given much land, but in different parts of his dominions, or like the new tribes constituted by Kleisthenes, having members scattered all over Attica instead of in one particular locality. Hence, at the great central sea where Europe, Asia and Africa meet, there is much congestion of the interests of the great powers, and especially in the Eastern end of the Mediterranean conflicting interests are so involved that of any nation but stor, it does so to the advantage or the prejudice of half

Inherent

a dozen others, and in time of war it seems as if those last days of the world had come, of which the Bible speaks, when every man's hand shall be against his brother

Browning,
"Bishop Blougram's
Apology."

Since "our interest's on the dangerous edge of things," it is no wonder that the Mediterranean should be of so much importance to Britain, the greatest European power, and that she should have acquired the powerful ~~chain~~ chain of positions stretching from west to east of that sea which she now holds. Gibraltar, the western key, Malta, the centre, and the mouth of the Suez Canal, the eastern key, of the Mediterranean, are all ⁱⁿ her possessions, and she also holds the administration of Cyprus, a most important eastern outpost, as well as a mandate over Palestine.

She was by no means the first to push such a line of posts through foreign regions. The civilisation that began in the East early spread westwards with the Phoenician advance, and later with the Greek colonists, while the Mohammedan menace of the Middle Ages followed the same track. Phoenicians, Greeks and Mohammedans all in turn occupied Cyprus and Malta; but they did not push so far west as to seize Gibraltar, nor indeed had the western nations become at that time of sufficient importance to warrant such a proceeding. There were also three great western influences which swept through the central sea: first that of the Romans, who occupied Malta and Cyprus, secondly that of the Crusaders, ~~who~~ the Templars occupying Cyprus, Rhodes, Crete and Malta, and lastly ^{that of} the British, who took Gibraltar in 1704, Malta in 1800, and obtained Cyprus in 1878. The Mediterranean has thus been the medium by which waves of the most conflicting influence, Aryan and Semitic, Western and Eastern, enlightened and depraved, Christian and Moslem, have passed to and fro between Europe and Asia, leaving no small mark on the intermediary positions at which they rested and secured their position

Browning

Of these the furthest east is Cyprus, and being on the extreme "dangerous edge," within the grasp, as it were, of the three continents, its history is a very long and chequered tale. From unwritten history we know that in very early times it had a high civilisation and was associated with Egypt, Assyria, Palestine and the Aegean lands, in both commercial and polemic relations. It seems then to have relapsed into obscurity and barbarism, whence it emerged as a result of the trade in copper which the Phoenicians started. Later the Greeks colonised the island and from its chief product gave it the name by which we now know it. Along with the Ionian cities it fell into the hands of the Persians, with them it joined in the Ionic Revolt of 502 B.C., and with them it was reconquered by the Persian general Artabazus; and although Pausanias and Cimon tried to set it free, it remained in Asiatic hands until a Greek called Evagoras obtained the chief power in the island about 410 B.C., and waging war on equal terms with the Great King, raised Cyprus to be one of the leading states of Greece, which was at that time disappointed by the Peloponnesian War. Being thus brought into Hellas, Cyprus joined Alexander the Great, and on his death became an object of contention among his successors, being ultimately secured by Ptolemy of Egypt in 294 B.C. Under his successors it was very prosperous for more than two centuries.

In 58 B.C. it passed into the hands of a western power, being captured by Cato for the Romans, under whose rule it enjoyed peace and a fair degree of prosperity. The only two outstanding incidents of this period of its history are the visit to the island of St. Paul, who converted it to Christianity, and the revolt against Trajan in 117 A.D. of the Jews who had come over in large numbers to work in the copper mines. This rebellion was very severely suppressed, and every Jew was expelled from the island.

At the division of the Empire Cyprus went to the Eastern half, and being now under considerably weaker rule, it was conquered in 647 by the Mohammedans and afterwards by the Saracens, but it was regained for the Empire in 965.

In 1184, however, a man called Isaac Comnenus seized the chief power and with the help of the King of Sicily set the Empire at defiance. He was not destined to enjoy his power long. In 1191 he foolishly seized and imprisoned on behalf of Saladin some English crews who had been shipwrecked on the island, and tried to seize Richard the Lionheart's sister and his betrothed, Berengaria. The fiery Richard ill brooked this insult; attacking and capturing the island he expelled Isaac and set up an English government. When, however, on his departure the island broke out in rebellion, he sold it to the Templars, from whom it was taken over in 1192 by Guy de Lusignan, nominal King of Jerusalem. He and his successors, being interested only in repelling the onsets of the aggressive Mohammedans, and probably looking on Cyprus as merely a temporary home, gave all power and authority in the island to persons of Latin race, and reduced the native population to the level of Goths and Wambas. Nevertheless, it was under the Lusignans, about the middle of the fourteenth century, that Cyprus attained its greatest prosperity from the trade between West and East — a prosperity, however, that was cut short by the plague in 1349.

The power of the Lusignans being now worn out by the Mohammedan attacks which thinned their ranks, internal dissensions which were scarcely less disconcerting, and plague, locusts and droughts which destroyed the produce of the land, Cyprus in 1489 passed by a marriage into the hands of Venice. The Venetian government was as oppressive as that of the Lusignans, its object being to gain money from the island and to use it as a base for war against the Turks, who now constituted the Eastern menace. In 1570, after floods, drought, locusts and

earthquakes had still ~~more~~ more reduced the island, the Turks found a pretext for attacking and capturing it. Under their dominion its decay went from bad to worse, and not till 1840 did prosperity begin to return. It was fairly prosperous, however, ~~in~~ when in 1878, by the Anglo-Turkish Convention, the Sultan handed it over to be administered by Great Britain, on condition that that country would help him to defend his Asiatic possessions. Unfortunately, however, our control over Cyprus is a little precarious, the agreement being that if Russia restores to Turkey Kars and her other conquests in the Russo-Turkish War, Britain is to evacuate the island.

When they came under British rule, the Christian population of Cyprus pressed for self-government, and to a large extent this was granted. Since then it has been the singular lot of Britain, while using Cyprus as a strategic position, to atone by the justice, clemency and freedom of her rule for the long series of misfortunes and oppressions that Richard I brought upon it when he sold it to the Templars.

Malta, half-way between Gibraltar and Cyprus, and between Europe and Africa, has not been occupied by as many races as have held Cyprus, but its unique position at the very centre of the Mediterranean ensured its being fought about by all the races that have sought to establish a power in the central sea. The Phoenicians, the earliest known navigators of the Mediterranean, were here again the pioneers of civilisation. After them the Greeks came to Sicily ~~and~~ in 735 B.C. and warred with them for the command of the sea. Between them Malta was a bone of contention, as it was later between Rome and Carthage in the Punic Wars, when, having been occupied now by this side and now by that, it was ultimately retained by the victors, and under their rule enjoyed commercial prosperity and good government, the Romans constructing many fine buildings and good harbour works. In 62 A.D. Malta, like Cyprus, was converted to Christianity by Paul. When it was annexed to the Eastern Empire in 395 A.D., Roman encouragement of commerce

being at an end, the name of the island sank into oblivion

In 828 came the first attack of the advancing Arabs, and in 870 the Maltese surrendered to the continued pressure of the Mohammedans, who used the island as a base for piratical expeditions, until in 1090 the Conquest of 1066 echoed in the South of Europe in its capture by the Normans. In 1194 it passed to the German Emperors and in 1266 to Charles of Anjou, from whom it was captured in 1284 by Peter of Aragon. Under him and his successors Malta was to a great extent self-governed, and the Maltese, though unimportant in the world's eye, were happy in their comparative freedom; they learnt self-reliance and love of liberty, and, when they were attacked by the Moors, retaliated with considerable success upon the Moorish coast of Africa.

In 1530 Malta and Gozo were given to the Knights of St John by Chas V, Emperor and King of Aragon. Naturally, the Knights strongly fortified the island, and in 1565 they were able to sustain a siege by an overwhelming force of their enemies, the Turks. After that they continued to fortify until the fortifications of Malta were the strongest and most celebrated in the world. Their attention, however, was not wholly bestowed on military works: they built hospitals and public works, and constructed roads and an aqueduct. But this was for their own convenience — as for the natives, they oppressed them as they had oppressed the Cypriotes. Moreover, the Order was becoming corrupt — the Knights were using Malta as a base for making sallies not only on Mohammedans but also on Christians, as the Arabs had done before them; they were becoming pirates and slave-raiders, and in 1775, when indeed the Order of St John had become out of date, a rebellion of the Maltese forced them to reform their conduct. When the French Revolution broke out, they were involved in financial difficulties, and offered small resistance to Napoleon when, on his way to Egypt in 1798, he called at Malta and expelled them.

The French, however, were immediately faced with a Maltese rebellion, and were indeed besieged in Valetta; and when in 1800 British and Portuguese ships blockaded the port, they were forced to surrender. The Treaty of Paris in 1814 confirmed Britain in the possession of Malta, and, like the Cypriotes, the Maltese began to press for more self-government. With them, however, a too liberal ^{constitution} government resulted in differences of opinion between the native and the British government, so now Malta is controlled by a Governor and a Council of twelve officials, practically as a Crown Colony. The natives, however, have their own aristocracy and their own laws, they are subject to no direct taxes, and all the Civil Service posts of the island are held by Maltese people.

Gibraltar, the gate of the Mediterranean, has quite a simple history, chiefly because up till the eighteenth century its strategic importance was not sufficiently recognised. It was one of the "Pillars of Hercules," and came into Moorish hands at the beginning of the eighth century A.D. In 1309 it was captured by the Spaniards of Castille, who attempted to attract a population to the Rock by conceding great privileges to those who could be persuaded to live on it. In 1316 it again fell into the possession of the Moors, but was recovered for Spain in 1462 by the Duke of Medina-Sidonia. It was then made a penal station and the convicts were set to work to construct fortifications. After an attack by the Algerian corsairs, these were made stronger, but subsequently were allowed to fall into decay, so that in 1704 Rooke practically took the place by surprise when he appeared before it with an English fleet. The British retained it without much trouble until 1713, when it was ceded to them by the Treaty of Utrecht. Since then the Spaniards have often tried to recover the Rock, but British feeling has always been too strong to allow the Government to barter it; and whenever the Spaniards attacked it they were unsuccessful, even when, aided by the French, they ~~besieged~~ besieged it for four years (1779-83), when it was in charge of General Eliott, afterwards Lord Heathfield.

Each of these three positions is of some importance in itself; Gibraltar is a port of call and coaling station for ships going to Africa and the East, and brings Britain in contact

with Spain, especially since a few thousands of Spaniards live within the British lines; Malta is also a port of call, and brings Britain and Italy into close proximity; Cyprus brings Britain into touch with Greece and Turkey, with the Sultan above all, the Eastern Moslem ruler to whom Cyprus pays tribute, although it is governed by a Western Christian power.

But it is when considered as a consecutive chain of positions that Gibraltar, Malta and Cyprus are chiefly important, since they command with ease the Mediterranean trade and the route to the East and Australasia. Gibraltar is the western gate of the Mediterranean and by means of it Britain can control the traffic passing to the East, ~~since the batteries with which the rock battles could in a very short time~~, since a fleet with this fortress as its base can prevent any ship attempting to pass the Straits without the goodwill of Britain. Being subject to attack on this account, it is strongly fortified and on the land side it is practically impregnable, being defended by the famous galleries in the rock. Water tanks of millions of gallons capacity are cut out in the rock, the strictest measures are taken against crowding, and no one can obtain the privilege of admission to the fortress without a passport. The defended harbour (of 440 acres in area) contains three docks for battleships and cruisers. With such precautions and fortifications Britain need have no fears for her control of the Western Gate.

Malta, in the centre of the central sea, occupies the dominating position that Monaco held in the imperial movements of the eighteenth century. Its fortified double harbour, one of the finest in the world, deep, commodious and completely sheltered except from the north-east, is equipped with a naval arsenal and is the headquarters of the fleet which protects all our commerce and our political interests in the Mediterranean.

Cyprus functions in the chain as a look-out post from which Britain may watch political developments in that tight corner where Russia and Turkey play so important a part; and while Britain holds the island no other power can use it as a base from which to harass her trade to the East.

All the great empires of the past were consolidated and strengthened by their position near the centre of the Old World; Rome at the middle, Athens, Assyria, Persia, Egypt

at the eastern end, of the Mediterranean. But Britain has a position that is doubly powerful: herself standing outside the Old World, she is at a place to which it is natural and easy for the trade routes of the whole globe to converge, and at the same time these three positions in the Mediterranean ensure the safety of her trade and political rights in the three earliest known continents. She has instinctively adopted in politics the stratagem of "breaking the line" which won back her naval reputation after the War of American Independence; she has, so to speak, outflanked Europe, and while the continent is watched by our fleets from the north and from the south, ~~we~~ whatever reverses our land forces may sustain, no European power can have an opportunity of becoming superior to us in our final and essential strength, our British navy

2 League of Nations

The books read for this essay were:-

Lucas' Historical Geography of the Mediterranean and Eastern Colonies, and
Encyclopaedia Britannica, sub Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus
