

Wanderers Awheel in Malta

British Stronghold Has Been a Steppingstone of Conquest Since
Phoenicians Cruised the Mediterranean and St. Paul
Was Shipwrecked There

BY RICHARD WALTER

“LOOK out!”

Ham's warning was almost too late. A glistening wall of blue Mediterranean swept across the deck of our little Maltese banana trader and dashed up the companionway after my flying feet.

Eighteen inches of trapped sea water swirled about in the crew's quarters. Clothes, battered books, and boxes washed over doorsteps into the passage, and with the next yaw scooted out to the foaming deck. Two shoes and an old hat sailed saucily from bunk to bunk.

Mounting the companionway to the bridge, I joined Ham where he sat high in the starboard shrouds. It was drier up there.

As I shinned aloft, I could see comber after comber rush furiously at our struggling little craft, each one threatening to swamp us, but merely crashing across our starboard bow and throwing another ton of seething water into our superstructure. Each time the boat seemed to gasp as she righted herself, like a girl who has received a pail of cold water full in her face.

Seasick Canaries Add to the Din

The *San Georg* was a strange vessel. Not over 70 feet in length, she plied between the Canary Islands and Malta, stopping at several north African ports on each incoming voyage. She was loaded ten feet above the gunwales with bananas, a cargo which placed her center of gravity dangerously high.

To add to the confusion, each member of the crew had a number of canaries stowed below in makeshift cages, making the bowels of the *San Georg* sound like Central Park Zoo before feeding time. At every pitch and toss of the boat a broken bunch of bananas careened across the deck and bade us adieu, followed by a new chattering outburst from a hundred seasick canaries.

The Maltese sailors love storms. Their faces betray their love for the sea. They are hardened to its fitful ways, for their lives, like those of any islanders, are wedded to the seaways.

I gazed around our tossing mess table. These were the men who had welcomed two foreigners—and cyclists at that—into their

crew. These were descendants of Europe's first sailors, who left the shores of Phoenicia to settle the Mediterranean's tiny gems, the Maltese Islands.

Across from me sat the captain, fat, jovial, kind, but unusual looking. His face bore Maltese characteristics common to every member of his crew. Dark, almost black hair covered his wide, squatty head. His complexion was decidedly olive-hued. His eyes were dark and sparkling, his forehead low, his mouth friendly and expressive. The queer glint in those eyes, and in the eyes of every Maltese we met, was soon to provide for us the key to their charm.

But this was no time for thoughts of charm. An increase in the gale's intensity jacked up new combers which roared across our deck as if they wore roller skates. Once again Ham and I hustled ourselves aloft, but not with our pre-breakfast hilarity.

Each swell threw the *San Georg* propeller free of the water, where, racing with futility, it made the whole ship tremble. Any moment we expected to hear the ominous rumble of burned bearings.

Suddenly my thoughts were arrested by two familiar objects washing across the deck below. Our bicycles! Our good steeds, veterans of 6,000 miles of pedaling in Europe and Africa, had snapped their fastenings and were on their way to Davy Jones! The next swell poised them on the edge. One more would ring the curfew. Seething and foaming, it rushed toward us.

Then we saw a shirtless figure moving carefully from post to post across the boat deck. Suddenly he lunged, caught our bicycles on the rise of the giant swell, and then himself was caught by a six-foot wall of sea water.

Rescue of the Bicycles

When the wash cleared away, our bicycles were still on deck. Beside them lay the Maltese mate. Amid persistent spray, we dragged him to cover and emptied his lungs. His first words were: “Your cycles—did I catch them?”

The storm's crescendo had passed when we hove into sight of the Maltese Islands. It was



Photograph from Richard Walter

Two American Cyclists Rest Their Steeds on the Isle of Malta

The author (right) and his companion, Edward Hamilton, stopped at the British Crown colony in the Mediterranean during a 42,000-mile tour of the world. They pedaled 9,000 miles, covering most of the remaining distance on shipboard.

the view which greeted the eyes of the Apostle Paul, whose experience at sea was more disastrous than ours. Two thousand years ago he was shipwrecked upon these very shores.

Tales of Ulysses and Cyclops

Ulysses, too, according to the Maltese, happened upon these three islets. And with their rocks and caves, they may have afforded excellent stamping grounds for the mythical one-eyed Cyclops.

Weary and bloodshot from a two-day sleepless vigil, our eyes were greeted with a pleasant calm as we passed between the sheltering arms of the Grand Harbour of Valletta. It was an impressive moment. The blue water of the Mediterranean wound fingerlike into the heart of brown, 16th-century Maltese battlements (pages 255, 260, 261, 262).

Scattered here and there, like bits of driftwood, were many small boats, both sail and steam, anchored in midstream.

Had it not been for the sleek British men-of-war bristling in an inlet to our left, the whole scene would have made an excellent medieval woodcut.

Skippers of fishing yawls hailed us good-naturedly as we passed, and our captain responded with a wave and a comical toot for £ each one. *Dghaisas* darted from town to town in the various reaches of the harbor. These were colorful gondolalike boats propelled by short but sturdy Maltese who stood out against the water's surface with their black hats and scarlet sashes.

Absent-mindedly, I wished that we might take a long ride in one of the graceful craft. Instantly the captain waved to a gondolier.

"Pietro! Take these two chaps on a complete circuit, will you—as a favor to me?"

The boatman grinned in assent, and rowed us far up to the head of the inlet, or Marsa, as the natives call it. Settings of pirate tales unfolded before us. Wine merchants rolled



Photograph by F. W. Stone from *European*

This String of Floats Bars Intruders from Britain's Naval Base in Wartime

Here the floats, chained to a breakwater, have been drawn together to leave the channel open. When stretched across to the other side, they support submerged nets which block the entrance to hostile submarines. Valletta rises in background.

huge kegs into bouncing lighters. Sailmakers, each with his circle of admirers, dotted the quay.

Returning along the opposite bank upon which perched the three cities of Vittoriosa, Cospicua, and Senglea, we were overshadowed by massive hundred-foot bastions (maps, page 257). The water gnawed at the junction where man-made wall met natural rock. And as we rounded the point of Senglea, our boatman directed our attention to a small turret upon the peak of a bastion.

A Heroine of "Maltese Misses"

Surprised, we noticed a hand-carved eye and ear upon it—reminding us of the gargoyles of Rome. But this, the boatman told us, was no mere ornament. It recalled the valiant Maltese girl who jumped to her death from that point, to escape mistreatment at the hands of Napoleon's marauders. The lofty turret was a monumental tribute to the spunk

of those whom we were soon to know as "Maltese misses."

After leaving the captain with our inadequate thanks, we found our second taste of Maltese generosity when we looked for a place to sleep. Unfortunately—or, considering later developments, fortunately—it was Saturday evening and banks were closed.

Not wishing to borrow money from the captain, we sought out the Boy Scouts, with the idea of camping somewhere outside of town. The Valletta scouts had no camp to offer, but they immediately set out in searching squads to find us shelter.

Inside of an hour we had a dozen offers of hospitality. Olive-skinned young men from all over the city earnestly insisted that we be their guests.

Though it had been almost unknown to us, Ham and I soon realized that Malta was one of the most prized treasures in European history. Many world powers had fought for it



Photograph by Pasi from Three Linn

Shops and Public Buildings Flank Strada Reale, Valletta's Main Street

To the Royal Opera House, with its tall Corinthian columns (right), come traveling opera companies each season (page 269). The Maltese also attend English musical plays and concerts here. Large British payrolls to soldiers, sailors, and workers in the vast naval yards bring prosperity to Malta's stores.



Malta, Mediterranean Danger Spot and Melting Pot

Only 20 minutes' flying time from Italian Sicily, this strategic naval base is a steppingstone between Gibraltar and Suez. Great Britain gained possession in 1814.



"Stepchild of the Mediterranean," Historians Have Called Malta

Before the coming of the British, Malta was ruled by Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, Normans, and French. Actually there are three small islands in the group—Malta, Gozo, and Comino—but usually they are referred to simply as Malta. Italy casts a covetous eye on the tiny area, whose deep, rock-sheltered harbors seem built to order for a modern fleet.



Photograph by Pasi from Three Lions

Shallow Balconies Encased in Wood and Glass Jut Out from Maltese Walls

Nearly every building is made from island limestone, which assumes with age pleasing shades of reddish yellow and brown. Walls are thick, floors often paved with stone, and ceilings high. Such a combination keeps the interiors cool, even in the hottest weather (page 271).

as the most strategic point in the Mediterranean.*

The ancient Phoenicians were the first colonizers, using the island as a base for western explorations. They were supplanted in the sixth century B. C. by the Carthaginians, who in turn were conquered by the Romans.

Rome gave way to the Byzantine Greeks, who then let it pass into the hands of the Saracens. Next came Normans, then Spaniards, and for almost 300 years the Knights of St. John held sway, defending their shores against Turkish and Arab invasions.

This order, which is more commonly known as the Knights of Malta, is among the most colorful groups of actors on the stage of history. Though of varied descent—Norman, Italian, and Spanish—they maintained in

* See, in the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE, "The Maltese Islands," by Sir Harry Luke, November, 1935, and "Malta: The Halting Place of Nations," by William Arthur Griffiths, May, 1920.

Malta one of the most trouble-free governing organizations in history. Remnants of the culture which they preserved from the earlier Mediterranean civilization, with the armor and coats of arms of the Knights themselves, are now on display in the Palace of the Grand Masters in the capital, Valletta.

The reign of the Knights was shattered when Napoleon thundered through on his way to Egypt in 1798. And he soon lost to Admiral Nelson, who brought this naval prize under the British flag.

At the time of our visit many rumors were rife. Among them was one that the Italians were setting up artillery to shoot sixty miles so they might bombard Malta from Sicily, 58 miles away. Naval assault would be difficult—but what of attack by air?

Strong Secret Defenses Guard Malta

At Malta, as at Gibraltar and Singapore, Britain has concentrated strong defenses. A



Photograph by Burton Holmes from Ewing Galloway

Ghostly Sentinels of Armor Line a Corridor of the Grand Palace

Government offices now occupy the first floor of the huge edifice, built by the early Knights of Malta. The second floor is filled with a vast collection of armor, weapons, and paintings of distinguished Grand Masters of this Crusader order. The Knights came to the island in 1530. Fifty years later they built the capital, Valletta, with its majestic buildings. The order continued to flourish for two centuries, but finally succumbed to the power of Napoleon.



Photograph by Keystone

Malta Welcomes the British Mediterranean Fleet as It Steams into Grand Harbour

This peacetime picture was made from the decks of the *Queen Elizabeth* when the mighty battleship led strong units of the British naval force to Malta. Old ramparts and buildings of Valletta rise on the rocky promontory in background.



Photograph from Underwood-Stratton

Valletta's Old Citadel Commands Malta's Harbor, Where British Battleships Lie at Their Moorings



Valletta's Ancient Bastions Dominate Malta's Grand Harbour

© Publishers Photo Service

These old ramparts, called the Upper Baracca, now bristle with modern guns. Atop the walls tropical gardens flourish. The slender tower (left center) houses the elevator which brings passengers from the customhouse below, at the water's edge. In the distance, warehouses flank Dockyard Creek, where the navy yard and huge floating dock are located.



Photograph by Burton Holmes from Ewing Galloway

Imported Wheat Goes into Big, Dry Storage Bins beneath Valletta's Open Square



Photograph by F. W. Stone from *Europeans*

Goats Give Valletta Her Most Serious Traffic Problem

Automobiles and horses are few, but flocks like these crowd the streets all day long. The three Maltese Islands are so small that there is not sufficient pasturage for cattle. Goats, not cows, are the principal source of milk. British soldiers and sailors drink canned milk to avoid contracting Malta fever (page 270).



Photograph by F. W. Stone from European

From Producer to Middleman to Consumer

Door-to-door delivery in Valletta has its drawbacks. Goats sometimes acquire an infection which is transmitted by their milk to humans. Origin of this disease, Malta fever, was discovered in 1887. Thirty years later, a U. S. Department of Agriculture bacteriologist found that many cows were infected. More commonly called "undulant fever," it is now world-wide and is acquired from unpasteurized milk of goats and cows.

three years' supply of grain lies stored in Floriana's subterranean vaults. Medieval castles with rugged bastions have been refitted and tunneled with secret fortifications.

Emergency submarine refuges and hidden anchorages have been established in the several inlets in the islands. St. Paul's, Mellieha, Salina, Madalena, St. Julian's, and St. Thomas Bays are plotted for such use with micrometer-like accuracy.

We were personally conducted through many of the defense works by British naval officers. Others, which were secret, were of course merely hinted at.

Afloat in the Grand Harbour, and ready to slip into action upon a second's notice, was half of Britain's Mediterranean naval might.

Thus, today, because of its proximity to Sicily, Malta wears a new and far more potent coat of armor just as defiantly as when she was held by her famous Knights. At present the island is a Crown colony of the United Kingdom.

Irrespective of the numerous régimes, the Maltese people have remained basically Phoenician, with only slight traces of Italian, Greek, and Arabic in their blood, and Latin and Arabic in their language. Nearly 265,000 of them live on the three islands—Comino, one mile square; Gozo, 9 miles by 4 miles; and Malta, 8 miles by 17 miles.

How this isolated, densely populated land can support all its thrifty but good-humored and startlingly prolific race has puzzled visitors for years. How do they live?



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Tombs of 400 Heroes Lie Beneath the Floor of St. John's Cathedral

The imposing structure, designed by Girolamo Cassar, the architect who built many of Valletta's fine buildings in the sixteenth century, is the home church of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. Every inch of the exquisite interior glows with paintings and carvings. Napoleon carried off most of the vast treasures of the church in 1798, but spared a group of magnificent tapestries which are hung on these walls during Pentecost (page 258).

Agriculturally speaking, Malta could support itself only part of the year. This means that the remaining supply for local consumption must be imported. So, in its balance of trade, we find imports for 1938 totaling nearly \$20,000,000. Below this sum stands the unbelievable figure for exports: less than a million and a quarter dollars.

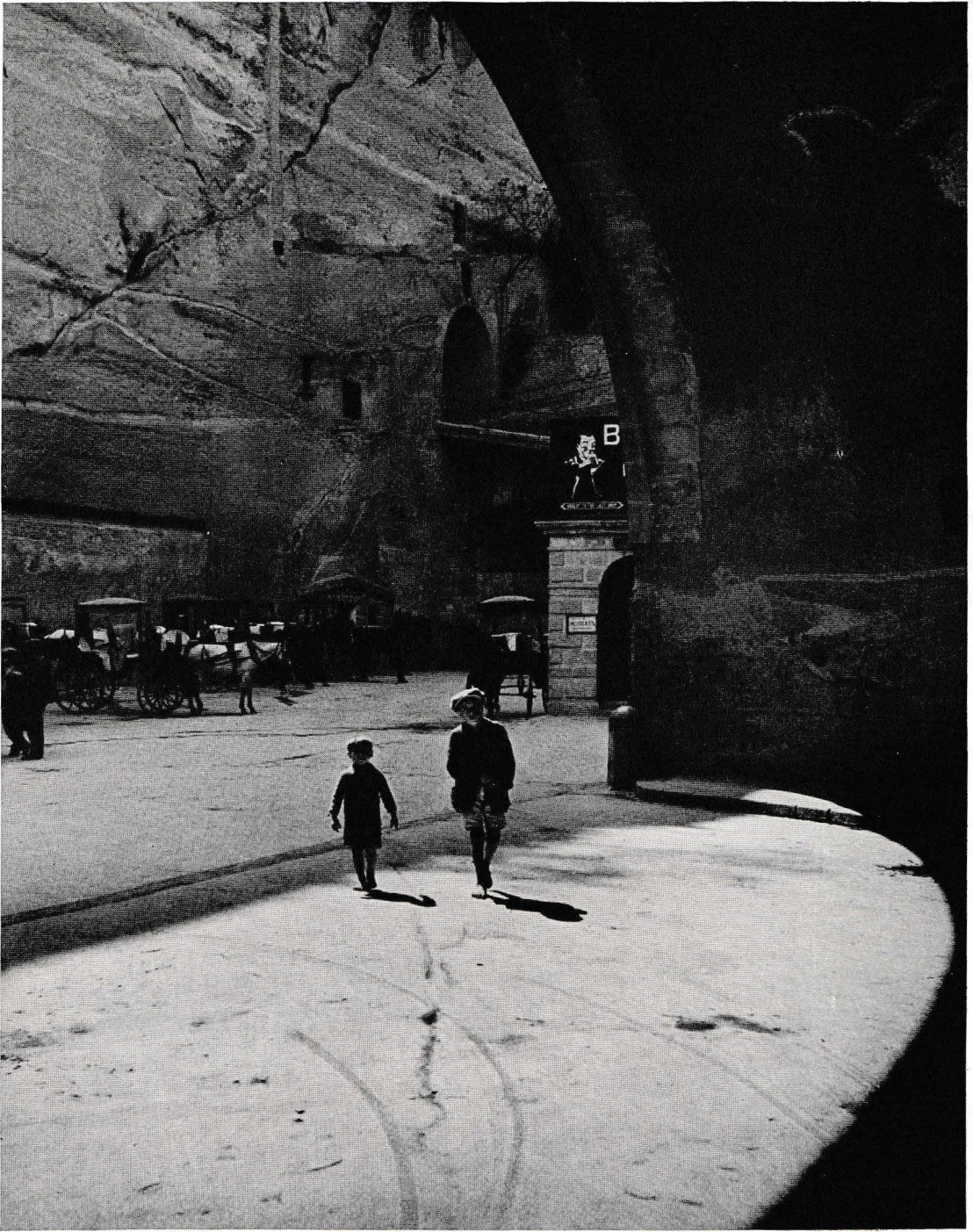
British Navy Nourishes Malta

This sounds economically impossible, and it would be were it not for one notable and two incidental sources of income. First of all, the British Navy pays thousands of pounds each year to dockyard workers, skilled craftsmen, and merchants, and for various entertainments. In addition, remittances to rela-

tives from Maltese abroad, and returns on foreign investments held by well-to-do descendants of the nobility, constitute a considerable buying power.

The Maltese know full well that they could not live were it not for the British Navy, and their respect and loyalty toward it are profound. In 1514 some 22,000 inhabitants could barely make a living on the Maltese Islands. With the increasing birth rate came poverty and, in 1667, the great plague which took 11,000 lives. In the early nineteenth century some 20,000 islanders died of starvation.

But under British influence, Malta's population increased twofold until the close of the World War, when sudden unemployment



Photograph by Burton Holmes from Ewing Galloway

Underground Streets and Tunnels Honeycomb Malta

Many subterranean passageways, including ancient catacombs, now are a part of the island's fortifications and defense system (page 258). Supplies are kept in many tunnels; others are bomb shelters. Beneath Valletta some of the underground areas serve as homes for the poor. Prehistoric man built temples and chambers in these vaults. In a pit beside one sacrificial altar lie thousands of human skeletons. Years ago one could walk underground from one end of Malta to the other. The Government closed the entrances to these tunnels after school children and their teachers became lost in the labyrinth while on a study tour and never returned (page 272).



Photograph by Edward Hamilton

The Author Sits Atop a Mine of Golden Grain

In dry subterranean strongholds, Malta stores enough grain for three years' use in the event of siege (pages 263 and 265). Although every available foot of land is cultivated, home-grown foods are not sufficient to supply island demand. Most provisions must be imported. Floriana's Cathedral of St. Josiah rises in background.

forced 15,000 to emigrate to the United States. Then increased naval activity caused a rise in population from 241,621 in 1931 to 264,663 in 1937.

The language of the islands is Maltese, a basically Phoenician tongue with mixtures of Latin and Arabic. Through the schools, English has come into fairly common use; most business transactions, as well as street signs and names of buildings, are in English. Strangely enough, the language of the courts formerly was Italian, although only a sixth of the people understood it. Now it officially is Maltese.

We saw at a glance that education is fairly

well cared for. One hundred and fifty-seven public elementary schools cater to 32,221 children, and 10 schools are maintained for the use of 1,845 secondary students. There is a small university in which English texts are used and lectures are delivered in Italian, English, and Maltese. However, many students study abroad. We visited ten of them at the University of Rome.

American Cyclists Go on the Air

Our introduction to Maltese generosity and kindness was soon followed by an unparalleled demonstration of hospitality.

The word had spread that two American cyclists were on the island and a flood of invitations to teas, luncheons, dinners, automobile rides, bicycle trips, club meetings, and dances poured in. Though we had no good clothes, everyone was friendly and appeared even more impressed than if we had worn conventional dress.

A druggist proffered free medical supplies for our expedition.

Women whom we had never seen before offered to do our laundry, darn our socks, and patch our clothing. A cycle shop volunteered to overhaul our bikes, piece by piece, furnishing us with new sets of tools and painting on our crossbars the flag of every country we had visited. The Lieutenant Governor gave us passes to every museum, palace, and monument on the island.

One of the island's newspapers took our picture and splashed our story across three columns. That dual-language spread must have reached every corner of the island—even the satellite isles of Gozo and Comino—because before the day was up requests for our

appearance on the air began to pour into the local broadcasting station.

A Contract "to Reminisce"

Two days later we signed a contract for twenty-five cents per minute on a half-hour broadcast. All we were required to do was to reminisce.

Radio in Malta is not radio; it is telephone. The system is called "rediffusion." One central radio station normally receives programs from all over Europe, selects from them the best program for each hour, and passes this on to the people. Radio sets are rented for \$3.75 per year and are connected to the main station by telephone lines.

Regardless of the time of day, we had merely to throw a switch and our program was preselected and pretuned in for us. The only advertising allowed consists of short local announcements.

Other means of entertainment are centered about the capital city, Valletta.

Setting the town ablaze, and showing the best British and American films, are several motion-picture houses, the most famous of which was named for Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena.

Maltese praise the gilt-adorned balconies of their Manoel Theater, reputed to have been built in 1731 and to have operated ever since without major repair.

Climate Encourages Cycling

The winter season sees the arrival of the finest traveling opera companies at the Royal Opera House in Valletta. There the music-loving Maltese can enrich their esthetic education at nominal prices (page 256).



Photograph by Pasi from Three Lions

Their Hats Are Their Parasols!

Older Maltese women stiffen black silk with cardboard or wire to make the arched hoods. The rest of the material falls as a cloak, the lower end being gathered in one hand to keep it from touching the ground. Maltese call their hood-and-cape combination a *faldetta*.

Cycling is popular. Many cycle from necessity, since only about 2,800 people own automobiles, but a large majority consider it a sport.

Every town supports several cycling clubs whose members tour the island in groups and who sponsor races every month of the year. The agreeable climate, with its annual mean temperature of 67 degrees, makes this possible.

Several times Ham and I were asked to officiate at these races. And we were invited upon many of the tours, the first of which gave us our initial view of the island of Malta as a whole.



AP Photograph from Pix

Old and New Styles Blend in Valletta's Narrow Streets

The younger generation is abandoning the cumbersome Maltese hooded cape called the *faldetta* for European dress (page 269).

The landscape appears barren of trees, the only ones on the island being grown in moist valleys.

Our general impression was one of rolling brown hills covered with rocky fields, each bounded by a rock wall. Indeed, some call Malta "the Mediterranean's rock pile." But that is a harsh overstatement.

The farmers have fought rocks for centuries, constantly refining and enriching their soil until it produces bumper crops of clover, wheat, barley, cotton, potatoes, onions, and citrus fruits.

The only difficulty lies in the fact that there is insufficient land to grow enough for the people. The eleven thousand farmers are for the most part tenants, renting their land for so much an acre. By careful irrigation and scrupulous terracing of every square foot of soil, they manage to cram three successive crops into one year.

Excellent water is piped from natural springs and artesian wells. Most of Malta's

21 inches of rainfall soaks into the lower water-bearing strata, thus keeping the wells amply supplied. Drainage facilities are good, and health standards are high.

Only one serious menace to health remains. This is a disease known as "Malta fever," caused by the bacteria *Brucella melitensis* in goats' milk (pages 264, 265).

The Maltese, because of the scarcity of pasture lands, have always kept goats instead of cows. A few of the latter have been introduced, but it was a common sight still for us to see large herds of goats being led from house to house.

As the goats mingle in the streets, the disease is spread among them and, in turn, the milk becomes generally infected. The only control available here at present is either the individual boiling of all milk, or the extermination of all goats.

Some years ago Gibraltar nipped an epidemic in the bud by the latter method; but Malta can scarcely risk the equally serious



Photograph by Williams from PIX

They Live Astride Britain's Lifeline of Empire

More than a quarter million civilians dwell on the three Maltese islands, heavily fortified Mediterranean naval base. They speak Maltese, basically an old Phoenician tongue (page 268). About one-sixth understand Italian. Many have learned English from British soldiers and sailors.

danger of a milk shortage for her people.

As one might judge from the density of population in Malta, there are so many towns that little space is left for countryside. Five cities are clustered around the Grand Harbour itself. On this first cycling trip we came upon a closely packed town every two or three miles.

Practically every building is constructed of Maltese stone, a type of Tertiary limestone which assumes with age beautiful shades of reddish yellow and brown.

The streets are narrow and lack sidewalks, but there is not enough wheeled traffic to cause congestion. Many streets are not wide enough for an automobile.

Interior design of most houses follows closely the Italian plan. House fronts push up to the street and all yard space lies in a court at the rear where century-old fountains bubble over exquisite rock gardens, blooming flower beds, and tiny patches of vegetables

along the walls. Here family communion is held.

Religion comes first in the life of a Maltese. One need only note the staggering number of Roman Catholic churches on the islands to realize it. An English friend once remarked that nowhere on Malta was there an outdoor spot from which at least one church could not be seen.

An example of the place of religion in Maltese life is the erection of the Musta church. Despite their poverty, church members with wholehearted sacrifice donated their savings to its erection.

One of World's Biggest Domes

Carpenters, masons, plumbers, and merchants contributed labor and materials free. And from this co-operative venture arose the third largest dome in the world. Only St. Peter's in Rome and St. Sofia in Istanbul have domes of greater dimensions.

As we rode about the island, we asked one of the girls in our party to talk to us more about her religion.

Tessa shook her dark curls, and her eyes fairly snapped.

"Our faith is the greatest thing in our lives. It was founded by the Apostle Paul when he was shipwrecked on this island and has remained unchanged for nineteen centuries. One of the many great services our Church did was to isolate victims of the great plague of 1667. Had it not been for the Church, everyone on the islands would have died."

As we cycled on, Ham and I were struck more and more by the broad scope of knowledge of Maltese youth.

It amazed us to discover how much they knew about the world. Their newspapers contain many educational items. And the desire of these young Maltese, ably demonstrated by their intense interest in us, seems to be to learn more and more of life about them.

Hundreds of Maltese youths visited Italy either to study or to travel. A few got to England. Many sail the ships of interoceanic trade, returning with vivid accounts of all they have seen and heard. But most striking of all is their knowledge of every inch of their own islands, principally of their little-known wonders of the world.

A Prehistoric Periscope

The strangest of these, the Hypogeum near Hal Safini, is a remarkable megalithic temple where prehistoric man worshiped his deities and buried his dead. Long shafts descend 30 feet below the earth's surface, where, carved from solid sandstone, lie dozens of odd rooms, including an altar, a long hallway, and a treasure vault.

The entire structure is said to have been illuminated indirectly with polished stone mirrors arranged periscopically in the shafts above. Some archeologists tend to discount this theory, as such early sanctuaries were supposed to be dim and mysterious for religious reasons. It is doubtful whether one person in a thousand would think of such an arrangement even now!

One of the chambers opens to the outside through a long shaft into which snakes and wild animals fell to their death. It is still littered with bones and tusks unfamiliar to our age. Near this gruesome butcher shop lies the megalith's reservoir, a deep, tapering rain catcher. In another chamber is a hollow

in the wall into which the high priest must have spoken.

When Ham spoke into it, I could hear his words in any room in the temple. The whole structure seemed to vibrate with the sounds.

Most uncanny of all was the fact that whereas low tones could be heard everywhere distinctly, high-pitched notes did not carry farther than the chamber itself. When Ham shrieked a falsetto version of "O Sole Mio" into the hollow, not a sound of it reached my ears!

More than once we soundly cursed the remiss methods of megalithic people. Their smoothly hewn halls and doorways were not over four and a half feet high, forcing us to "pleat" our six-foot statures to a more practical height.

Tragedy in Malta's Tunneled Maze

While we cycled homeward, our friends told us that the island was honeycombed with a network of underground passages, many of them catacombs.

Years ago one could walk underground from one end of Malta to the other, but all entrances were closed by the Government because of a tragedy.

On a sight-seeing trip, comparable to a nature-study tour in our own schools, a number of elementary school children and their teachers descended into the tunneled maze and did not return.

For weeks mothers declared that they had heard wailing and screaming from underground. But numerous excavations and searching parties brought no trace of the lost souls. After three weeks they were finally given up for dead.

Sections of this underground network have been used to protect military and naval supplies. Indeed, many of the fortifications themselves are merely caps atop a maze of tunnels (page 267).

Thus is Malta fortified. Her thrifty, religious, and intelligent people love peace. Yet, with war in Europe, they now are in the center of Mediterranean strife.

Among the first activities of Italy after Mussolini's declaration of war on June 10 was the bombing of the island.

The establishment in 1937 of a new air base, in addition to the tremendously strategic naval position she occupies, makes Malta guardian of the central Mediterranean—a possession to be prized, perhaps again to be fought for.