

THE MIRACLE OF MALTA



A VERBATIM REPORT OF LADY DOBBIE'S ADDRESS TO WOMEN
DURING HER RECENT VISIT TO AUSTRALIA.



To crowded women's meetings throughout Australia Lady Dobbie told the story of "The Miracle of Malta" from her standpoint as Governor's wife.

Two Striking Excerpts from Press Interviews.

● My husband and I were sent to Malta quite unexpectedly. When the Commander-in-Chief had his last talk with my husband in London, before we set out for Malta, he said:

"I am sending you to Malta simply for one reason—you must hold Malta at all costs, it is terribly important to the enemy."

Sir William just bowed his head and said, "With the help of God, I will sir."

That was the secret of it. It was God's Power.

● Soon after our arrival in Malta my husband and I discussed what we should do. And we decided that each night in the Palace we would publicly offer prayer for the safety of the Army, and for those in England.

One evening after dinner the General announced his decision and invited any who wished to adjourn with him to the Library. He got up and I followed him, wondering if anybody else would come, and to my amazement everybody had come. This went on night by night and very many distinguished visitors, including Mr. Anthony Eden and Lord Wavell, went to that room where the General prayed very briefly and simply. We had a considerable number of distinguished visitors there, we called them D.V.'s and they all seemed to appreciate that few moments that we gave over to ask God's help. The General said, it was a case of "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord."

From all quarters have come requests for Lady Dobbie's talk to be printed (price 6d., postage 1½d.). The Inter-Varsity Fellowship of Evangelical Unions of Australia, who had the privilege of sponsoring the Tour of Sir William and Lady Dobbie, have pleasure in producing this verbatim report.

Also available:

- General Dobbie's Talk, "The Hand of God in Malta." (Price 6d., Postage 1½d.)
- Gramophone records of excerpts from General Dobbie's talks have been recorded and may be ordered from I.V.F., Scot Chambers, Hosking Place, Sydney. Price, 7/6. Freight extra.
- "We Invite a General," by Paul White, I.V.F. Gen. Sec. (in preparation).

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LADY DOBBIE'S ADDRESS AT MELBOURNE TOWN HALL,
THURSDAY, 9th MAY.

IT is a great pleasure for me to stand here and to think how many of you are interested enough in Malta to come and listen to my talk. I do not pretend to be a dramatic woman who can hold audiences enthralled, but I like to see women in front of me because I can talk in a homely fashion about my own life in Malta and every-day things.

I often think I get a great deal of credit for courage which was not deserved at all. If I had wanted to get away from Malta, I could not have done so. Once the Island was besieged there was no nonsense about any nervous Governor's wife going home. We could not spare the petrol to send anyone home because they "got the jitters," so I was doomed to stay in Malta. I look back on those years as amongst the happiest in my life.

Malta is a very small island, and we were up against things badly from the very beginning. We were ill prepared for any sort of siege or difficulty. It has only just struck me since coming to Australia how very near you were to having an invasion. There were many invasions that might have taken place all the world over, yet they just did not. It was a miracle that kept these enemies back. Only One does miracles, and that is God. He said to the enemy, like He says to the sea on our shore, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further." Hitler did not always make mistakes, but he made some very bad ones in this war from his point of view. One of the worst was not invading England

after the retreat from Dunkirk when all our ammunitions of war had to be left on the shore or on the road down from Belgium. My own son was in that retreat, and he said it was pitiful to see the wonderful tanks, guns, and other weapons of war that had to be left behind. Thank God that three-quarters of that army did get back. Hitler knew exactly in what state they had arrived in England. Why did he not turn round and come across the ocean and attack England? It is a most extraordinary thing. Looking back on that we would say it was the strategic mistake on the part of a man who had planned an invasion for years. The Japanese did not come to you in Australia, or the Italians to us in Malta. They were all the most wonderful deliverances. I think we ought to thank God for the great deliverances of this war.

Now the first thing I want to tell you about is what preparation we had for war in Malta. A great many of you have heard my husband speak, I know, but I will quickly run through our state of preparedness, or unpreparedness, for war.

You could not imagine a place less prepared for any invasion or attack by sea or air. We had four aeroplanes—old, obsolete things. They were Gloucester Gladiators, which even in that day were considered quite out-of-date. They were very slow and altogether unsuitable for the work they had to do.

We had about six young Air Officers in Malta, and an Air Officer commanding. I am still wondering how they came to be there, for there was nothing for them to command or fly. They must have been on their way to somewhere else. They got hold of these aeroplanes and took them out of the crates and turned them from bombers to fighters. With those four we began the war, and every time the air raid warning went, three went up. The pilots would sit in the 'planes throughout the hot Mediterranean summer, for directly the air raid warning went, they could not wait one moment. They had to go up at once. It was a most gallant fight they put up. The people of Malta put tremendous faith in them. They used to call these aeroplanes Faith, Hope and Charity—there was plenty of hope about them, but very little else, except indomitable courage. They had to tackle practically the whole of the Italian Air Force; certainly that part of it stationed in Sicily. The Italians would come, a hundred bombers at a time, supported by as many fighters, and our three little aeroplanes would go up to tackle them. It was a most wonderful and inspiring sight. Sometimes they did bring one down, and it encouraged the Maltese people tremendously. I saw them go into action a score of times from the top of the Palace of Malta. Of course, the enemy 'planes were very much faster. Our three went on like the little nigger boys—from four to three, three to two, and two to one, and when just that poor one, which was Faith, and is now a museum piece in Malta, remained, we did get some more out from England—about thirty. That relieved our immediate position. The Air Officer Commanding used to say to the Governor, "We have shot down one hundred enemy

aeroplanes this month," and the Governor would reply, "Well, so you ought—you've had plenty of practice!"

We had four battalions of infantry and altogether. We also had some Maltese *one of Maltese*, some five thousand men Artillery in addition to our own. Their task was to protect a quarter of a million people and stand guard over between thirty and forty miles of little bays where invasions might take place. Mussolini had promised us that he would be ruling over Malta in the first five days of war, and humanly speaking there was no reason why he should not have been. However, the Italians are neither as brave nor as enterprising as the Germans or the Japanese. They thought they could take a short cut and that if they bombed and bombed from a great height (which makes it safer, I might tell you) they would overcome Malta and bomb her bravely out of her. That was an easier way than by a direct invasion! Our preparations for an invasion included the placing of small groups of men at various positions along the beaches. They were told to keep their eyes glued on the sea day and night to watch for the first signs of anything coming over from Sicily. I used to go round with the Governor. We would take these men something to occupy their time when off duty—footballs, dart boards, books—anything to keep them satisfied while they were having such a dull life. Every time the Governor went round he would say, "There may only be a lad of nineteen on watch to-night, but on him might depend the whole safety of Malta." They only had one visitor, and that was the man who brought them their rations once in three days, and I do not suppose he was very thrilling. We were

told that the signal for invasion would be the ringing of church bells. We listened and listened, and we were all to do wonderful things and not be the last bit flurried, but it never came, thank God! I am sure that our men would have fought to the end.

However, we did get the bombing. You see there was the invasion scare; the bombing, which we had plenty of; and the fear of starvation, which was the most dangerous and subtle of the lot. On June 10, 1940, we were warned that from midnight Italy would be at war with us. At 6.30 the next morning came the first air raid warning. I thought, "I wonder how the people are going to stand up to that." We had a lot of people staying in the palace, and they went down at once to the air raid shelters. These raids went on. They would just be down there for half an hour when the all clear would go. You cannot imagine how interrupted your life was, particularly in regard to meals. At last I got hold of the servants, the footmen and butler, and said that it was no good having such interrupted meals. I told them to serve meals at the proper times, regardless of air raids, and if people were too frightened to come for their meals, they would have to go without. At least the servants could be sure that I would be there. That was the only thing to do. We had three regular daily raids, in addition to smaller ones. I think the Italian airmen in Sicily used to look at their watches and say, "We have half an hour to spare, let's go and worry Malta." We had 2,300 raids while we were there. The people used to keep a note of the number. We practically saw the bombing finish—there was not very much more after we left. As we were preparing to leave Malta and the new

Governor was due to arrive, my husband said, "I guess we shall go off in an air raid. It will be a case of bombing out the old and bombing in the new." The raids had been terrific throughout that winter. They had got worse and worse during the Christmas of 1941-2. I will never forget my last Easter Sunday in Malta. The raids were incessant throughout the day. We were never hit in our palace—the Governor has three; one where he works, another where he lives, and the third we lent to the nuns for an orphanage. The one where we resided was never hit, although we had narrow escapes. I was in the garden picking oranges one day, and I thought "There goes a bomb. I wonder if I am still alive." It came very close, but did not hit the palace. Our windows in the residential palace were broken, but we were never actually hit. The beautiful show palace at Valetta was terribly bombed.

You are wondering how we lived through the bombing. There was one secret of it all. You see Malta has been a bone of contention for thousands of years, and subterranean passages had been built under the Island. These were very useful to us during the war. When war broke out, every man in Malta was advised to go into his garden and dig a cave for himself and family. After a short time, everyone in Malta was able to get into a shelter, if they wanted to, but they were not compelled to do so. I know if any of us from the palace had been killed by a bomb, people would have said, "Well, it serves them jolly well right. They would not go into a shelter." We found that it did help people if you did not rush and bolt into a shelter. They say cowardice is very catching, but I think courage is more so. They minded bombs no more than

a shower of rain. If you live with people like that, you cannot have a fit of hysterics. They would all say, "What are you doing?"

We then got the Germans, and that was very different to the Italians. So much so that a woman in a shelter was heard to pray, "Please, God, grant that it may be the Italians who are coming over, and not the Germans!" When the Germans took to coming, they came right down low—no nonsense about keeping high.

I do not think some people are born brave and some born cowards. I think the whole battle is who you live with, and whether they are brave. If they are, you cannot start a private fear of your own.

Some of these shelters were hundreds of years old. I went into one that was about a mile long. In this place anyone who wanted shelter could go in at night. They staked out a claim, of which they had the use from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. They had to take their bedding up and down, but the beds were allowed to remain there. They had about 1,500 down; people were born and died there. It was well ventilated and lighted, and doctors put their hands at once on any epidemic. It is all very well to go into a shelter, but it is what you find when you come out that is distressing. The people of Malta have enormous families—15 is nothing. A mother would go in the shelter at night with her children, and when she came up in the morning, what would she find but her house on the ground; everything gone in a minute and a half. One did not know what to say to a person in that position, with destruction all around. The children had to be fed and clothed, and they had no home to go to. They were put on a cart and taken ten miles out into the heart of

the Island. Probably the house they hoped for was already occupied. The Protection Officer would look round and then the church would open its doors. You could get a great many families into a big church. They would have curtains put up, and settle down there with what they had rescued, and would be there for eighteen months. A strange life, wasn't it? Everything they had was gone—furniture that had come down from mother to daughter, etc. And did these women ever complain? Not a word of it! I remember the Governor telling me he went down after a raid and met a woman we knew very well whose house had been bombed to the ground. He sympathised with her, and she looked at him, tears in her eyes, and said, "It doesn't matter so long as we win this war." I hope all those people are being compensated now, and that the Island is being built up and they are beginning to forget those horrible days. One man's shop in Valetta was destroyed three times. After the first and second bombings he had re-built it, but when it was destroyed for the third time he said, "I am not going to try again."

The Germans took to bombing the aerodromes and the infantry used to have to go out and try to repair these. There was a tremendous number of casualties amongst the troops in the aerodromes.

I remember as the food position got worse, the A.D.C. said to me one day, "Well, I suppose we will be living on grass soon, but it will be offered in such grand style, on these lovely silver dishes, that we won't mind!" Everybody was beginning to get a bit thin and hungry. I have often looked at a piece of toast at breakfast and said to myself, "I don't think I am hungry enough to warrant that piece of toast; somebody in the

kitchen needs it much more than I." We often had to do that.

I particularly want to mention the wonderful work of the Merchant Navy. Ninety per cent. of everything had to come over the sea. The moment the merchant ships started on their thousand miles' journey, the enemy was following like a cloud of mosquitoes. They would start off eight, and come in four; seven, and come in three. They would be carrying munitions of war, and petrol, besides our ordinary supplies, and they knew that one bomb on the ship would send them to the bottom, and it did, over and over again. When we were told of a convoy coming in, we would go down and wave. It was wonderful to see the Merchant Navy slip into the Grand Harbour. They were bringing us food and other things we needed. They used to come in, listing, partly shot away, but still safe. The men were always given an invitation to visit us at the palace. These gallant men, who had been on the bridge for seven or eight nights, would put on clean collars and come to lunch, bringing with them a parcel of tea, or something equally scarce. When leaving, they always said the same thing—"We will be back again in three months. Don't you worry. We won't let you down." But very often they were hit on the return journey, and never came again. There is the classical case of the last convoy that got through before Rommel was beaten. Out of a convoy of fourteen, only three ships reached Malta. That was the price the Merchant Navy paid to keep us fed in Malta, and I think all of us in Malta learned to value the Merchant Navy in quite a different way.

I want to bring home a lesson that I learned in Malta. It was always with me. I told you that we did not have to

go into the shelters if we did not want to. The shelters were rock, and I always used to think of them as a parable, the rock speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are told over and over again in the Scriptures that He is the Rock. You may take the rock as an exact picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only safety in Him, but you are not compelled to take that safety if you do not want it. Over and over again in the Bible we have the invitation, but not a command. Remember, it is not a command to have your sins forgiven. It is an invitation—"Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I learned that when I was a very small child. I think a personal testimony is much more telling than anything else. I cannot talk about the experience of others, but I can tell you of mine. When I was a very tiny child I found the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour. I think a picture of Him was shown to me by my nurse or mother, who were both most wonderful Christians. I believe "the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." I have had an infant, six months' old, stiffen with temper because its bottle was too cold. Children are born in sin. From the time of the Fall, the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked. In baby language I think I was told that I was a sinner, and that I could come to the Lord Jesus and obtain salvation.

I used to wish that I could see my name written in some wonderful golden book, to make sure that my sins were forgiven. Then some years later, I listened to a C.S.S.M. (Children's Special Service Mission) beach meeting, and the speaker said, "Now, children, I dare say some of you would like to see your name written

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somewhere, you would like to be quite sure that you are safe for eternity," and I thought, "Yes, I would." The speaker continued, "God could not give us a book with the names of all the people who have believed, who are believing, and who will believe, written in it, and so He thought of one wonderful word that comprehends the whole lot—"Whosoever." "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3, 16). "If you want to know you are saved, put your name in that 'whosoever,'" he said. I read my name in that "whosoever," and knew without any doubt that I was saved. My name has never been removed, thank God.

Everlasting life begins now. It is a wonderful thing to know that you have eternal life when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is too easy to talk about God. Hitler and others used to bring God's name into everything, in hypocrisy, but I am talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. You say God and Christ are the same. That is true, but the Lord Jesus Christ was God made man, the Ladder set up from earth to Heaven. Until we use that Ladder, we are not safe. We are outside the rock shelter. You may be trusting in your own goodness or unselfishness (which I don't deny, for I have a great respect for mothers, and think they are the most unselfish people in the world), yet these things are false security. A young officer and his wife in Malta had to take a house in a much bombed spot, so they had the brick shelter made much more secure. One morning at 6 o'clock there was a great air-raid, and they took the precaution of sending the nurse and their baby down to the shelter, congratulating

themselves that they had made it perfectly safe. Then when they heard the end of the air-raid warning, they went down to the shelter to tell the nurse to bring the baby out, and to their horror they found the shelter had been hit and their baby and the nurse killed. That taught me a lesson in false security. Do not put your hopes in anything that will not stand the test. Do not depend on your own goodness or righteousness. Remember it is the Lord Jesus Christ Who paid the debt and is the righteous One.

The Lord Jesus has been a wonderful Master to me. I have had a wonderfully happy life, and if I lived it all over again I would ask to have it just the same. I began a subaltern's wife, and ended a Governor's wife. I have been in all parts of the world, but have taken the Lord Jesus Christ with me. He has given me a most wonderfully happy life. We have had sorrows. We lost our elder son in Italy in 1944, but if you know the Lord Jesus Christ you can take all those sorrows as from Him, and I feel now that that was in love. Though he was the light of his father's eyes, he takes it in that way. Often my husband has said, "Well, I always think of Arthur's great joy and happiness now, and what he is enjoying in Heaven." It is so wonderful when you know that Lord, and can take everything as from Him. Though at first it may be rough, after a while the sweetness of the Lord softens the sorrow.

Until you can say, "Thou blest Rock of Ages, I'm hiding in Thee," you do not know what real security and peace are. You can be ready then for the storms of life. My final word to you is that you should yourselves know that your feet are secure in the Rock of Ages.