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GENERAL METAXAS.

(Being an address by Mr. D. E. GALATIS, Hon. Deputy Consul for Greece, delivered at Tientsin on Friday, 28th February, 1941.)

IN the early hours of the 29th day of January, while Greece was waging a life-and-death struggle defending herself against the unprovoked aggression of a powerful and ruthless neighbour, the death occurred, after a short illness, of our Prime Minister and National Leader, General Metaxas.

An attempt to give you a short account of his life, his qualities, and his accomplishments and services to our country, is the purpose of this broadcast, a rare honour and privilege, for which our thanks are due to Mr. P. H. B. Kent, who had the kindness to suggest it.

Our departed Leader came from one of the oldest and most distinguished patriarchal families of Greece. The roots of the Metaxas family tree can be traced back to Byzantium. Marcantonios Metaxas, after having fought at the side of Constantinos Palaeologos, last Byzantine Emperor, who fell at the gates of Constantinople in 1453, had like so many other Greek pat-

riots, left Constantinople and migrated to the Island of Cephalonia, where he settled at the little village of Frantzata, since named Metaxata after him. And among his descendants we find many outstanding national figures, of whom I will only mention: Nicodimos Metaxas, 1585-1646, archbishop; Anastasios Metaxas, 1650-1714, governor of Western Greece; Marinos Metaxas, 1752-1820, jurist, governor of Ithaca; General Andreas Metaxas, 1790-1860, one of the foremost leaders of the War of Independence and later Minister of War; Constantinos Metaxas, 1792-1870, also a leader during the War of Independence, and later senator; General Nicolaos Metaxas, 1833-1903, instructor at the Military College of Athens and Minister of War; and Anastasios Metaxas, born in 1861, noted architect, who drew the plans of the Athenian Stadium, and later senator.

Contrary to the general belief, the late Leader was not born in Cephalonia, like his father and most of his ancestors, but at

Vathy, capital city of the nearby smaller island of Ithaca, world famous as the birthplace of Homeric Odysseus, where his father was serving as college professor. This was on the 12th of April, 1871, by a remarkable coincidence only a few years after these two and the other five Ionian islands were returned to Greece by Great Britain, a noble gesture that served to strengthen the bonds which have always united the two countries.

After completing his preliminary education, first in Ithaca, and later in Cephalonia, he entered the Military College of Athens, from which he graduated in 1890 with the rank of 2nd lieutenant of engineers and was at once commissioned in the National Army. He took part in the unfortunate Graeco-Turkish War of 1897, during which he was repeatedly cited for distinguished conduct. After that war, he was sent by the Government for higher military studies at the Berlin Academy of War, where, for his exceptional intelligence and for the amazing facility with which he could solve the most complicated military problems, he was given the nickname of "Little Moltke". He returned in 1903 to be attached to the General Staff. From 1910 he was detailed as aide-de-camp

to the late Eleftherios Venizelos, then Premier and Minister of War.

Early in 1912, he was sent to Sofia and later to Belgrade, where he negotiated the Military Alliance between Greece and her northern neighbours, which assured the Balkan states' victory over Turkey and resulted in the liberation of millions of Greek nationals until then under Turkish domination. In December of the same year, he accompanied the Greek Premier to London and, as his military adviser, assisted him in the negotiations of the Treaty of Peace with Turkey. Only a few months later, he concluded a new Military Pact with Serbia, which brought about the brilliant victory of Greece and her Allies at the second Balkan War of 1913.

In the meantime he was promoted to the rank of colonel, and in 1915 became Chief of the General Staff, from which position, however, he later resigned due to a disagreement on the Government's military policy.

During the abnormal events of 1916 to 1920, he stayed away from home, returning only at the end of 1920, after the fall of Venizelos and the restoration of the late King Constantine. However, from that time he flatly refused to take any active part in the Army, and, upon his un-

yielding insistence, he was placed on the reserve list, on December 29th, 1920, with the rank of General.

From this time General Metaxas established himself also as a political leader with the organizing of his own, now famous, party of "The Free Thinkers". But, disagreeing with the leaders of the Military Revolution of 1922, he supported the unsuccessful counter-revolution of 1923 and left the country until 1925. In 1926 he returned and reorganized his party, participating in the various coalition cabinets of that time as Minister of Communications. He was out of Parliament from 1928 to 1931, but was returned again in 1932.

He played a very prominent part in subduing the Venizelist uprising of 1935, and, as an old, staunch and trusted supporter of the Dynasty, he was mainly responsible for the return to the throne of H.M. King George II in that year. Following the death of Demertzis, first post-restoration Premier, in April 1936, he became Premier, and four months later: on August 4th, 1936, with the King's consent, he abrogated Parliament and assumed full powers of Government.

Now, having completed this short genealogy and biography, I will try to enumerate, as I see

them, the main qualities he possessed and the most outstanding of his accomplishments and of the services he has rendered to our country, which endeared him to all his co-nationals and evoked the admiration of the entire world.

First, as to his qualities. I will start with the general and broad statement that he embodied most of the finest characteristics of the Greek race; those characteristics and qualities which created the immortal ancient Greek civilization, preserved it through the Dark Ages and transmitted it to the West, and which made possible the nation's great achievements during the War of Independence at the beginning of last century, and its later struggles, including the present one.

Besides extraordinary intelligence, nature endowed him with a very active and creative mind, and with a farsightedness and clear judgment that often amazed even his closest collaborators, not only in military and political affairs, but also in many other of the multiple matters of state, on which his advice was sought during his 50 years of public life.

He was an ardent patriot, always placing his country before and above everything else, ready

to run any personal risk and to make every personal sacrifice in serving it. He had full and unshakable faith in the nation and its destinies, and he knew how to handle his people and how to rouse them to noble and exalted deeds. On this point, I will quote from his address to the members of his cabinet, in answer to their congratulations on the occasion of the anniversary of his name-day, Jan. 7th last, when he said: "We have not created the moral qualities that the Greek nation shows to-day. They were there, though perhaps partly dormant. All we have done was to stir them up, to co-ordinate them and to push them forward. Our task ended there. The rest, the miracle that is being accomplished, is the work of the Greek people".

He was devoutly religious. Like the vast majority of the nation, he belonged to the Greek Orthodox Church, but has never in any way interfered with the religious liberties of the minorities: Israelites, Mussulmans, Catholics, Protestants, etc.

He was a hard and untiring worker. Besides the Premier-ships, the responsibilities of which would be more than sufficient to take up all the time and energy of even a much younger man, he had not less than five Ministries under him,

namely those of War, Navy, Air Foreign Affairs and Education, to which we must add the important duties of Supreme Commander of all Armed Forces, which he assumed since the beginning of the present war.

He also had to be present at numerous public meetings, ceremonies, inaugurations, dinners, receptions, conferences, and to attend to the countless other matters, big and small, that are incumbent upon the office of a popular National Leader.

An early riser, he was at his desk before eight, and very often had his very simple tiffin served in the office, to continue his work right through the afternoon and the evening, and even late into the night.

Though severe and with an iron hand in the administration of the nation's internal affairs, he was not harsh and has never resorted to blood or party purges. On the contrary, he has not hesitated to extend a friendly hand to former adversaries once he was convinced that this would serve the country's interests.

He was straightforward, loyal and sincere, both in his private and public life, and accessible to all.

He was a good husband and a model father.

A man of few words, he was precise and clear in his expressions, finding the right words at the right time, patient, poised and of unassuming manner.

He dressed simply and modestly. Though a military man, he had a strong dislike for uniforms, which he wore only when he could not do otherwise.

His preferred recreation was reading, mostly books of military and political interest, and walking in the country.

Now, as to his accomplishments and services to the country, exceptional and very valuable though they were during the earlier part of his career, I will not occupy your attention on that period any longer, but will devote myself solely to the last four and half years of his life, that is to the time between his assumption of the full powers of government on August 4th, 1936, and the time of his death.

To refresh your memories as to the reasons that necessitated the change that took place on August 4th, 1936, and to show the great importance we all attached to it and the confidence and faith we placed in General Metaxas, I think I cannot do better than read to you *verbatim* the first three paragraphs of an article I published in the local

Press on August 4th, 1937, the first anniversary of that historic date.

I wrote then: "Among the many important anniversaries in Greece's 3,000 year old history, one of the most outstanding and most memorable is undoubtedly the one we are celebrating today. On August 4th 1936, with the whole-hearted approval of H.M. King George II, and the unanimous acclaim of the Greek people, H.E. John Metaxas took in his strong and able hands the government of the country. The reasons of this sudden change have in some instances been badly misunderstood and grossly misrepresented. The facts, however, speak for themselves, and it is now the general opinion of all impartial observers that this change, solely due to the dangerous situation created by the impossibility of Parliament to give a strong government, on account of the long, bitter and irreconcilable divergencies between the various political parties, and precipitated, as a result of the above by the menacingly growing influence of communism, was not only necessary and justified, but really indispensable, in order to avert the ruinous results of the threatened civil war, similar to the Spanish, to bring back the lost national tranquility and unity, and to assure a better future for the country. There-

fore, H.M. King George II, and the National Leader, H. E. John Metaxas, fully deserve the title of 'National Saviours' so justly given them."

Indeed, at the top of the long and varied list of his services to the nation, we have to place General Metaxas' timely, methodical and bloodless liquidation of the communistic menace and the reestablishment of national unity at that time, because without them the rest of his work would have been impossible. The explanation as to how these objectives were attained, General Metaxas gave himself in his great speech of November 11th, 1940, at the University of Athens, when he proclaimed the spiritual mobilization of the nation. He said: "The element which I have introduced into the political life of this country is a thing which did not often exist in the Hellenic states of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, though whenever it existed it led them to victory, and whenever it was absent, despite intellectual attainments, obscurity soon followed. That element we lacked during the past hundred years of our existence, and its absence has been the cause of our greater disasters. It is the element of discipline. Not of servile subjection, but of conscious discipline, self-subordination and self-control, something that keeps the rights and liberties of the

individual within limits, beyond which the needs and claims of the State commence. Thanks to this element of discipline we have built up our fighting forces, which are at this moment winning victories on land, at sea and in the air, and we have secured those civic liberties for which we are now fighting, and that Greeks, not only at home, but all over the world have risen like one man. It is thanks to this element of discipline that we have aroused a more virile spirit in the Youth of Greece, and we are now marching against the foe with orderly precision and with such enthusiasm. And if I have not followed dogmatic theories about internal policy, I must ask you to remember that you yourselves know better than anyone else that politics is not a science any more than war is a science; they are both phases in the struggle of life, of the fight for national existence and for the conditions under which every nation wants to live. It is these conditions which determine the doctrines of politics, and unfortunately they do not obey scientific laws. Before the necessity of *primum vivere deinde philosophare*, all other needs for dogmatic theorizing give way. Thus I led the Greeks, fully conscious of what they were doing, to the day of October 28th 1940. And thus I was your mouthpiece when we

replied to the enemy 'Molon Lave'." ('Molon Lave', meaning "come and get them", was the answer given by Leonidas to Xerxes at Thermopylae, 480 B.C.).

With disciplined national unity assured, and with the King's support, the great leader, surrounded by able, well-chosen and conscientious and devoted collaborators in all important departments, set out on a vast programme of internal reconstruction and reform. No branch of public service, no class of society, no source of national power, material or moral, escaped his attention. Special measures were taken for the poor and the sick. The working classes have been protected, and the provision of social insurances against industrial accidents, sickness, disability and old age has been made a reality. Commerce in all its forms, industry, agriculture and the mercantile marine have been encouraged and assisted. Disease, especially malaria and tuberculosis, has been combatted and considerably reduced. Special wards and courts were established for the protection of children. Education received his very special attention. Difficult and thorny ecclesiastical problems were settled. The police force has been reorganized and placed under direct state control. Crime has been combatted and reduced to the minimum.

Tourism, both from outside and within the country has been developed under the new Vice-Ministry of Tourism and Press. Taxation was modified in a spirit of justice and fairness, according to the economic possibilities of each class. Public finances and national economy have been put on a sound basis, and national currency has been stabilized. National highways and roads have been built and repaired, and communications in general were improved and modernized. In legal matters, the new Civil Code has been completed and comes into force on the 1st of July next, and the Hellenic Institute of International and Foreign Law has been established. The theatre and all other forms of art have received due assistance. He organized Youth under the National Youth Organization, of which he was the President, and which he referred to as 'the child of my heart.'

In parallel with internal reconstruction and reform, General Metaxas occupied himself right from the beginning, with the reorganization of the national fighting forces, and with the strengthening of national defences, which included the construction of the "Metaxas Line." No effort and no expense was spared in this connection, but, for obvious reasons, I am not in a position to go into details.

In foreign affairs, the cardinal points of General Metaxas' policy were: very close friendship and collaboration with Turkey, maintenance and stability of the Balkan Entente, and improved relations with Italy, while preserving the nation's traditionally good relations with Great Britain and France, as well as with Germany, Russia and the United States, and with the rest of the world. "Greece neither asks nor wants anything of any power, and will consider the demanding of territory from her by any other state as a hostile act", he declared in November 1938.

In implementing this totally peaceful policy, he has repeatedly visited Ankara and other Balkan capitals, and sent some of his best lieutenants on numerous special missions to the most important political and commercial centres of the world. He has had a two-hour conference with King Edward VIII, during the latter's Mediterranean cruise in 1936, and, while President of the Council of the Balkan Entente during 1938/1939, he made great efforts to induce Bulgaria to enter the Entente. As to Italy, the agreement of September 1939 that each side should withdraw its military police from the Albanian frontier, and the exchange of notes in November of the same year, reaffirming the friendly

relations between the two countries and prolonging the treaty of friendship and conciliation, first concluded in October 1929, are results of this policy.

And it is an incontrovertible fact that he strove, perhaps more than anyone else, to maintain peace and to keep the horrors of war from spreading to that part of the Mediterranean, and that he adhered to a policy of absolute neutrality and of strict observance of the rules of International Law.

Yes, he desired peace. He believed in peace. He needed peace for the completion of his internal work, of reconstruction and reform; for the preparation of the nation for a better future: for what he repeatedly called "the third Hellenic civilization". And, I repeat, he worked for peace earnestly and with devotion. But not, as some seem to have imagined, peace at any price. Not peace at the sacrifice of national honour and freedom. Not peace at the expense of national independence and integrity. Not peace that would mean the denial of the nation's best, and for 30 long centuries most dearly cherished traditions and ideals. Not peace at the price set by the ultimatum of October 28th. Such a price, no true son of Greece would ever agree to pay. And least of all, General Metaxas.

He not only rejected that ultimatum, but informed the Italian Minister, who called at his private residence at 3 o'clock in the morning to deliver it, that he considered its terms and the way it was presented tantamount to a declaration of war. And without losing a single moment, he communicated with the King, summoned his collaborators, had the mobilization order signed, and, upon the violation of the frontier by Italian troops before the expiration of the 3-hour time limit, he issued his magnificent, high-spirited proclamation to the nation. "Helenes" he said *inter alia*, "Italy, not recognizing Greece as a free nation, demanded the surrender of a part of our national territory. . . . The time has come for all Hellenes to fight to the death for the independence of Greece, for her integrity, for her honour. We will now show whether we are truly worthy of our ancestors and of the freedom assured to us by our forefathers. Let the nation arise. Fight for your fatherland, for your wives, for your children and for our sacred traditions. Now, to battle."

The nation responded like one man. Confident of the righteousness of its cause, it took up the struggle with the determination to die rather than submit to the invader. And in this short space of four months,

incidentally rounded to-day, the Greek Forces, though facing a numerically far superior and better equipped enemy, and though fighting under the most adverse conditions, have more than justified all the faith and trust he placed in them, and they have added many new glorious pages to the nation's history. Not only have they beaten the invader out of Greek territory, but with the support of the gallant R.A.F., have succeeded in pushing him far back into the mountains of Albania, and brought freedom to the districts of Koritza, Argyrocastron, Delvinon, Agi Saranta, Himara, Klisoura, etc., the population of which in its great majority is to-day and has always been Greek, although it remained for hundreds of years outside the national frontiers.

However, with all these achievements, remarkable and important though they are, the struggle is not, of course, finished, or even near its end. On the contrary, we expect it to be long and bitter. We know that we will have new and bigger hardships to face, more sacrifices to make, and that there might even be complications, and perhaps surprises. We are fully alive to the seriousness of the task. It would have been a difficult struggle even if our

departed Leader had lived to direct it to the end, as we all hoped and prayed. It will be much more difficult now.

But, no matter how difficult the struggle, and how great the loss caused by the untimely death of her Leader, "Greece is eternal and immortal", as he often said, and as King George recalled in His last Royal Proclamation to the Fighting Forces, adding that "the virtues of Metaxas were purely Greek virtues", and voicing His conviction that "patriotism and self-sacrifice will inspire all" to the end.

Thus, the nation, solidly united around its beloved King, the capable and much respected new Premier, Alexander Koryzis, whom General Metaxas himself, —as the last but certainly not the least of his services to the country—had designated as his successor, the brilliant and popular Commander-in-Chief, General Alexander Papagos, and the other civil and military heads,—all tried and trusted collaborators

of the late Leader,—will follow the course of duty and honour that he has set, and, to quote again from his speech at the University of Athens, ". . . we shall march forward. And we shall win. Closely united with our great Allies, the British, we shall win. And let us never forget that,—even were we to fail, which we shall not, because we will win,—we Greeks have always valued Honour more than Victory".

And when—let us hope, at not a far distant date,—the white dove of Peace, tired and blood-covered, will have returned to this troubled world, and the historian will have completed his work, the name of General John Metaxas will undoubtedly figure along those of Pericles, Leonidas and Themistocles, of the defenders of Messologgi, Alamana and Gravia, of the heroes of Kilkis, Bizani and Scra, of the victors of Pindus, Morava and Klisoura, as one of the greatest Hellenes of all time, one of those who made Greece the glory that she was and the glory that she is.