

side, and the greater the miracle the greater the glory. This hyperbolic tone, characteristic of the old Spaniards, and said to have been imported from the East, is particularly visible in the accounts of their struggles with the Spanish Arabs, where large masses were brought into the field on both sides, and where the reports of a battle took indeed the coloring of an Arabian tale. The same taint of exaggeration, though somewhat mitigated, continued to a much later period, and may be observed in the reports of the contests with the Moslems, whether Turks or Moors, in the sixteenth century.

On the fifteenth of March, 1563, Hassem left Algiers, at the head of his somewhat miscellaneous array, sending his battering train of artillery round by water, to meet him at the port of Mazarquivir. He proposed to begin by the siege of this place, which, while it would afford a convenient harbor for his navy, would, by its commanding position, facilitate the conquest of Oran. Leaving a strong body of men, therefore, for the investment of the latter, he continued his march on Mazarquivir, situated at only two leagues' distance. The defence of this place was intrusted by Alcaudete to his brother, Don Martin de Córdoba. Its fortifications were in good condition, and garnished with near thirty pieces of artillery. It was garrisoned by five hundred men, was well provided with ammunition, and was victualled for a two months' siege. It was also protected by a detached fort, called St. Michael, built by the count of Alcaudete, and, from its commanding position, now destined to be the first object of attack. The fort was occupied by a few hundred Spaniards, who, as it was of great moment

to gain time for the arrival of succors from Spain, were ordered to maintain it to the last extremity.

Hassem was not long in opening trenches. Impatient, however, of the delay of his fleet, which was detained by the weather, he determined not to wait for the artillery, but to attempt to carry the fort by escalade. In this attempt, though conducted with spirit, he met with so decided a repulse, that he abandoned the project of further operations till the arrival of his ships. No sooner did this take place, than, landing his heavy guns, he got them into position as speedily as possible, and opened a lively cannonade on the walls of the fortress. The walls were of no great strength. A breach was speedily made; and Hassem gave orders for the assault.

No sooner was the signal given, than Moor, Turk, Arab,—the various races in whose veins glowed the hot blood of the south,—sprang impetuously forward. In vain the leading files, as they came on, were swept away by the artillery of the fortress, while the guns of Mazarquivir did equal execution on their flank. The tide rushed on, with an enthusiasm that overleaped every obstacle. Each man seemed emulous of his comrade, as if desirous to show the superiority of his own tribe or race. The ditch, choked up with the *débris* of the rampart and the fascines that had been thrown into it, was speedily crossed; and while some sprang fearlessly into the breach, others endeavored to scale the walls. But everywhere they were met by men as fresh for action as themselves, and possessed of a spirit as intrepid. The battle raged along the parapet, and in the breach, where the

struggle was deadliest. It was the old battle, so often fought, of the Crescent and the Cross, the fiery African and the cool, indomitable European. Arquebuse and pike, sabre and scymitar, clashed fearfully against each other; while high above the din rose the warcries of "Allah!" and "St. Jago!" showing the creeds and countries of the combatants.

At one time it seemed as if the enthusiasm of the Moslems would prevail; and twice the standard of the Crescent was planted on the walls. But it was speedily torn down by the garrison, and the bold adventurers who had planted it thrown headlong into the moat.

Meanwhile an incessant fire of musketry was kept up from the ramparts; and hand-grenades, mingled with barrels of burning pitch, were hurled down on the heads of the assailants, whose confusion was increased, as their sight was blinded by the clouds of smoke which rose from the fascines that had taken fire in the ditch. But although their efforts began to slacken, they were soon encouraged by fresh detachments sent to their support by Hassem, and the fight was renewed with redoubled fury. These efforts, however, proved equally ineffectual. The Moors were driven back on all points; and, giving way before the invincible courage of the Spaniards, they withdrew in such disorder across the fosse, now bridged over with the bodies of the slain, that, if the garrison had been strong enough in numbers, they might have followed the foe to his trenches, and inflicted such a blow as would at once have terminated the siege. As it was, the loss of the enemy was fearful; while that of the

Spaniards, screened by their defences, was comparatively light. Yet a hundred lives of the former, so overwhelming were their numbers, were of less account than a single life among the latter. The heads of fifty Turks, who had fallen in the breach or in the ditch, were cut off, as we are told, by the garrison and sent, as the grisly trophies of their victory, to Oran<sup>11</sup>; showing the feelings of bitter hatred—perhaps of fear—with which this people was regarded by the Christians.

The Moorish chief, chafing under this loss, reopened his fire on the fortress with greater fury than ever. He then renewed the assault, but with no better success. A third and a fourth time he returned to the attack, but in vain. In vain too Hassem madly tore off his turban, and, brandishing his scymitar, with imprecations on his men, drove them forward to the fight. There was no lack of spirit in his followers, who poured out their blood like water. But it could not shake the constancy of the Spaniards, which seemed even to grow stronger as their situation became more desperate; and as their defences were swept away, they threw themselves on their knees, and from behind the ruins still poured down their volleys of musketry on the assailants.

Yet they could not have maintained their ground so long, but for a seasonable reinforcement received from Mazarquivir. But, however high the spirit, there is a limit to the powers of endurance; and the strength of the garrison was rapidly giving way under

<sup>11</sup> Cabrera, Filipe Segundo, lib. vi. cap. 10.

incessant vigils and want of food. Their fortifications, moreover, pierced through and through by the enemy's shot, were no longer tenable; and a mine, which Hassem was now prepared to run under the ramparts, would complete the work of destruction. They had obeyed their orders, and stood to their defence gallantly to the last; and they now obtained leave to abandon the fort. On the seventh of May, after having sustained eight assaults and a siege of three weeks, from a host so superior to them in numbers, the garrison marched out of the fortress of St. Michael. Under cover of the guns of Mazarquivir, they succeeded in rejoining their comrades there with but little loss, and were gladly welcomed by their commander, Don Martin de Córdoba, who rendered them the honor due to their heroic conduct. That same day Hassem took possession of the fortress. He found only a heap of ruins.<sup>12</sup>

The Moorish prince, stung with mortification at the price he had paid for his victory, and anxious, moreover, to anticipate the arrival of succors from Spain, now eagerly pressed forward the siege of Mazarquivir. With the assistance of his squadron, the place was closely invested by sea and land. Batteries of heavy guns were raised on opposite sides of the castle; and for ten days they thundered, without interruption, on its devoted walls. When these had been so far shaken as to afford an opening to the be-

<sup>12</sup> For this siege, the particulars of which are given in a manner sufficiently confused by most of the writers, see Ferreras, *Hist. d'Espagne*, tom. ix. p. 431. et seq.; Cabrera, *Filipe Segundo*, lib. vi. cap. 10.; Sepulveda, *De Rebus Gestis*

*Philippi II.*, p. 94.; Salazar de Mendoza, *Monarquía de España*, (Madrid, 1770,) tom. ii. p. 127.; Miniana, *Historia de España*, pp. 341, 342.; Caro de Torres, *Historia de las Ordenes Militares*, fol. 154.

siegers, Hassem, willing to spare the further sacrifice of his men, sent a summons to Don Martin to surrender, intimating, at the same time, that the works were in too ruinous a condition to be defended. To this the Spaniard coolly replied, that, "if they were in such a condition, Hassem might come and take them."

On the signal from their chief, the Moors moved rapidly forward to the attack, and were soon brought face to face with their enemy. A bloody conflict followed, in the breach and on the ramparts. It continued more than five hours. The assailants found they had men of the same mettle to deal with as before, and with defences yet stronger than those they had encountered in the fortress of St. Michael. Here again the ardor of the African proved no match for the cool and steady courage of the European; and Hassem's forces, repulsed on every quarter, withdrew in so mangled a condition to their trenches, that he was in no state for several days to renew the assault.<sup>13</sup>

It would be tedious to rehearse the operations of a siege so closely resembling in its details that of the fortress of St. Michael. The most conspicuous figure in the bloody drama was the commander of the garrison, Don Martin de Córdoba. Freely exposing himself to hardship and danger with the meanest of his followers, he succeeded in infusing his own unconquerable spirit into their bosoms. On the eve of an as-

<sup>13</sup> According to Cabrera, (Filipe Segundo, lib. vi. cap. 12.) two thousand infidels fell on this occa-

sion, and only ten Christians; a fair proportion for a Christian historian to allow. *Ex uno*, etc.

sault he might be seen passing through the ranks with a crucifix in his hand, exhorting his men, by the blessed sign of their redemption, to do their duty, and assuring them of the protection of Heaven.<sup>14</sup> Every soldier, kindling with the enthusiasm of his leader, looked on himself as a soldier of the Cross, and felt assured that the shield of the Almighty must be stretched over those who were thus fighting the battles of the Faith. The women caught somewhat of the same generous ardor, and, instead of confining themselves to the feminine occupations of nursing the sick and the wounded, took an active part in the duties of the soldiers, and helped to lighten their labors.

Still the condition of the garrison became daily more precarious, as their strength diminished, and their defences crumbled around them under the incessant fire of the besiegers. The count of Alcaudete in vain endeavored to come to their relief, or at least to effect a diversion in their favor. Sallying out of Oran, he had more than one sharp encounter with the enemy. But the odds against him were too great; and though he spread carnage among the Moslem ranks, he could ill afford the sacrifice of life that it cost him. In the mean time, the two garrisons were assailed by an enemy from within, more inexorable than the enemy at their gates. Famine had begun to show itself in some of its hideous forms. They were already reduced to the necessity of devouring the flesh of their horses and asses<sup>15</sup>; and even that

<sup>14</sup> Ferreras, *Hist. d'Espagne*, tom. ix. p. 455.

Campana, *Vita di Filippo II.*, tom. ii. p. 138.

was doled out so scantily, as too plainly intimated that this sustenance, wretched as it was, was soon to fail them. Under these circumstances, their spirits would have sunk, had they not been sustained by the expectation of succor from Spain; and they cast many a wistful glance on the Mediterranean, straining their eyes to the farthest verge of the horizon, to see if they could not descry some friendly sail upon the waters.

But Philip was not unmindful of them. Independently of the importance of the posts, he felt his honor to be deeply concerned in the protection of the brave men, who were battling there, for the cause not merely of Castile, but of Christendom. No sooner had he been advised by Alcaudete of the peril in which he stood, than he gave orders that a fleet should be equipped to go to his relief. But such orders, in the disabled condition of the navy, were more easily given than executed. Still, efforts were made to assemble an armament, and get it ready in the shortest possible time. Even the vessels employed to convoy the India galleons were pressed into the service. The young cavaliers of the southern provinces eagerly embarked as volunteers in an expedition which afforded them an opportunity for avenging the insults offered to the Spanish arms. The other states bordering on the Mediterranean, which had, in fact, almost as deep an interest in the cause as Spain herself, promptly furnished their contingents. To these were to be added, as usual, the galleys of the Knights of Malta, always foremost to unfurl the banner in a war with the infidel. In less than two months an armament consist-

ing of forty-two large galleys, besides smaller vessels, well manned and abundantly supplied with provisions and military stores, was assembled in the port of Malaga. It was placed under the command of Don Antonio de Mendoza; who, on the sixth of June, weighed anchor, and steered directly for the Barbary coast.

On the morning of the eighth, at early dawn, the sentinels on the ramparts of Mazarquivir descried the fleet like a dark speck on the distant waters. As it drew nearer, and the rising sun, glancing on the flag of Castile, showed that the long-promised succor was at hand, the exhausted garrison, almost on the brink of despair, gave themselves up to a delirium of joy. They embraced one another, like men rescued from a terrible fate, and, with swelling hearts, offered up thanksgivings to the Almighty for their deliverance. Soon the cannon of Mazarquivir proclaimed the glad tidings to the garrison of Oran, who replied, from their battlements, in thunders which carried dismay into the hearts of the besiegers. If Hassem had any doubt of the cause of these rejoicings, it was soon dispelled by several Moorish vessels, which, scudding before the enemy, like the smaller birds before the eagle, brought report that a Spanish fleet under full sail was standing for Mazarquivir.

No time was to be lost. He commanded his ships lying in the harbor to slip their cables and make the best of their way to Algiers. Orders were given at once to raise the siege. Everything was abandoned. Whatever could be of service to the enemy was destroyed. Hassem caused his guns to be over-

charged, and blew them to pieces.<sup>16</sup> He disencumbered himself of whatever might retard his movements, and, without further delay, began his retreat.

No sooner did Alcaudete descry the army of the besiegers on its march across the hills, than he sallied out, at the head of his cavalry, to annoy them on their retreat. He was soon joined by his brother from Mazarquivir; with such of the garrison as were in condition for service. But the enemy had greatly the start of them. When the Spaniards came up with his rear-guard, they found it entirely composed of janizaries; and this valiant corps, maintaining its usual discipline, faced about and opposed so determined a front to the assailants, that Alcaudete, not caring to risk the advantages he had already gained, drew off his men, and left a free passage to the enemy. The soldiers of the two garrisons now mingled together, and congratulated one another on their happy deliverance, recounting their exploits, and the perils and privations they had endured; while Alcaudete, embracing his heroic brother, could hardly restrain his tears, as he gazed on his wan, emaciated countenance, and read there the story of his sufferings.

The tidings of the repulse of the Moslems were received with unbounded joy throughout Spain. The deepest sympathy had been felt for the brave men who, planted on the outposts of the empire, seemed to have been abandoned to their fate. The king shared in the public sentiment, and showed his sense of the gallant conduct of Alcaudete and his soldiers, by the

<sup>16</sup> Ferreras, *Hist. d'Espagne*, tom. ix. p. 461.

honors and emoluments he bestowed on them. That nobleman, besides the grant of a large annual revenue, was made viceroy of Navarre. His brother, Don Martin de Córdoba, received the *encomienda* of Hornachos, with the sum of six thousand ducats. Officers of inferior rank obtained the recompense due to their merits. Even the common soldiers were not forgotten; and the government, with politic liberality, settled pensions on the wives and children of those who had perished in the siege.<sup>17</sup>

Philip now determined to follow up his success; and, instead of confining himself to the defensive, he prepared to carry the war into the enemy's country. His first care, however, was to restore the fortifications of Mazarquivir, which soon rose from their ruins in greater strength and solidity than before. He then projected an expedition against Peñon de Velez de la Gomera, a place situated to the west of his own possessions on the Barbary coast. It was a rocky island fortress, which, from the great strength of its defences, as well as from its natural position, was deemed impregnable. It was held by a fierce corsair, whose name had long been terrible in these seas. In the summer of 1564, the king, with the aid of his allies,

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 442. et seq.—Cabrera, Filipe Segundo, lib. vi. cap. 13.—Campana, Vita di Filippo II., tom. i. pp. 137–139.—Herrera, Hist. General, lib. x. cap. 4.

The last historian closes his account of the siege of Mazarquivir with the following not inelegant and certainly not parsimonious tribute to the heroic conduct of Don Martin and his followers: "Despues de noventa y dos dias que

sostuvo este terrible cerco, y se embarcó para España, quedando para siempre glorioso con los soldados que con el se hallaron, ellos por aver sido tan obedientes, y por las hazañas que hizieron, y el por el valor y prudencia con que los gobernó: por lo qual es comparado á qualquiera de los mayores Capitanes del mundo." Historia General, lib. x. cap. 4.

got together a powerful armament, and sent it at once against Peñon de Velez. This fortress did not make the resistance to have been expected; and, after a siege of scarcely a week's duration, the garrison submitted to the superior valor—or numbers—of the Christians.<sup>18</sup>

This conquest was followed up, the ensuing year, by an expedition under Don Alvaro Bazan, the first marquis of Santa Cruz,—a name memorable in the naval annals of Castile. The object of the expedition was to block up the entrance to the river Tetuan, in the neighborhood of the late conquest. The banks of this river had long been the refuge of a horde of pestilent marauders, who, swarming out of its mouth, spread over the Mediterranean, and fell heavily on the commerce of the Christians. Don Alvaro accomplished his object in the face of a desperate enemy, and, after some hard fighting, succeeded in sinking nine brigantines laden with stones in the mouth of the river, and thus effectually obstructed its navigation.<sup>19</sup>

These brilliant successes caused universal rejoicing through Spain and the neighboring countries. They were especially important for the influence they exerted on the spirits of the Christians, depressed as these had been by a long series of maritime reverses. The Spaniards resumed their ancient confidence, as they saw that victory had once more returned to their banner; and their ships, which had glided like

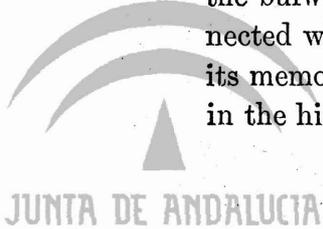
<sup>18</sup> Cabrera, Filipe Segundo, lib. vi. cap. 18.—Herrera, Hist. General, tom. i. p. 559. et seq.

<sup>19</sup> The affair of the Rio de Tetuan is given at length in the despatches of Don Alvaro Bazan,

dated at Ceuta, March 10. 1565. The correspondence of this commander is still preserved in the family archives of the marquis of Santa Cruz, from which the copies in my possession were taken.

spectres under the shadow of the coast, now, losing their apprehensions of the corsair, pushed boldly out upon the deep. The Moslems, on the other hand, as they beheld their navies discomfited, and one strong place after another wrested from their grasp, lost heart, and for a time, at least, were in no condition for active enterprise.

But while the arms of Spain were thus successful in chastising the Barbary corsairs, rumors reached the country of hostile preparations going forward in the East, of a more formidable character than any on the shores of Africa. The object of these preparations was not Spain itself, but Malta. Yet this little island, the bulwark of Christendom, was so intimately connected with the fortunes of Spain, that an account of its memorable siege can hardly be deemed an episode in the history of Philip the Second.



Patrimonio Monumental de la Alhambra y Generalife  
CONSEJERIA DE CULTURA

JUNTA DE ANDALUCIA

## CHAPTER II.

## THE KNIGHTS HOSPITALLERS OF ST. JOHN.

Masters of Rhodes.—Driven from Rhodes.—Established at Malta.—Menaced by Solyman.—La Valette.—His Preparations for Defence.

1565.

THE order of the Knights of Malta traces its origin to a remote period—to the time of the first crusade, in the eleventh century. A religious association was then formed in Palestine, under the title of Hospitaliers of St. John the Baptist, the object of which, as the name imports, was to minister to the wants of the sick. There was a good harvest of these among the poor pilgrims who wandered from all parts of Europe to the Holy Land. It was not long before the society assumed other duties, of a military nature, designed for the defence of the pilgrim no less than his relief; and the new society, under the name of the Knights Hospitaliers of St. John, besides the usual monastic vows, pledged themselves to defend the Holy Sepulchre, and to maintain perpetual war against the infidel.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Helyot, *Hist. des Ordres Religieux et Militaires*, (Paris, 1792, 4to.), tom. iii. pp. 74–78.—Vertot,

*History of the Knights of Malta*, (Eng. trans., London, 1728, fol.) vol. ii. pp. 18–24.

In its new form, so consonant with the spirit of the age, the institution found favor with the bold crusaders, and the accession of members from different parts of Christendom greatly enlarged its power and political consequence. It soon rivalled the fraternity of the Templars, and, like that body, became one of the principal pillars of the throne of Jerusalem. After the fall of that kingdom, and the expulsion of the Christians from Palestine, the Knights of St. John remained a short while in Cyprus, when they succeeded in conquering Rhodes from the Turks, and thus secured to themselves a permanent residence.

Placed in the undisputed sovereignty of this little island, the Knights of Rhodes, as they were now usually called, found themselves on a new and independent theatre of action, where they could display all the resources of their institutions, and accomplish their glorious destinies. Thrown into the midst of the Mussulmans, on the borders of the Ottoman Empire, their sword was never in the scabbard. Their galleys spread over the Levant, and, whether alone or with the Venetians, — the rivals of the Turks in those seas, — they faithfully fulfilled their vow of incessant war with the infidel. Every week saw their victorious galleys returning to port with the rich prizes taken from the enemy; and every year the fraternity received fresh accessions of princes and nobles from every part of Christendom, eager to obtain admission into so illustrious an order. Many of these were possessed of large estates, which, on their admission, were absorbed in those of the community. Their manors, scattered over Europe, far exceeded in num-

ber those of their rivals, the Templars, in their most palmy state.<sup>2</sup> And on the suppression of that order, such of its vast possessions as were not seized by the rapacious princes in whose territories they were lodged, were suffered to pass into the hands of the Knights of St. John. The commanderies of the latter—those conventual establishments which faithfully reflected the parent institution in their discipline—were so prudently administered, that a large surplus from their revenues was annually remitted to enrich the treasury of the order.

The government of this chivalrous fraternity, as provided by the statutes which formed its written constitution, was in its nature aristocratical. At the head was the grand-master, elected by the knights from their own body, and, like the doge of Venice, holding his office for life, with an authority scarcely larger than that of this dignitary. The legislative and judicial functions were vested in councils, in which the grand-master enjoyed no higher privilege than that of a double vote. But his patronage was extensive, for he had the nomination to the most important offices, both at home and abroad. The variety and high-sounding titles of these offices may provoke a smile in the reader, who might fancy himself occupied with the concerns of a great empire, rather than those of a little brotherhood of monks. The grand-master, indeed, in his manner of living, affected the state of a sovereign prince. He sent his ambassadors to the

<sup>2</sup> Boisgélín, on the authority of Matthew Paris, says that, in 1224, the Knights of St. John had 19,000 manors in different parts of Europe,

while the Templars had but 9,000. Ancient and Modern Malta (London, 1805, 4to.), vol. ii. p. 19.

principal European courts; and a rank was conceded to him next to that of crowned heads,—above that of any ducal potentate.<sup>3</sup>

He was enabled to maintain this position by the wealth which, from the sources already enumerated, flowed into the exchequer. Great sums were spent in placing the island in the best state of defence, in constructing public works, palaces for the grand-master, and ample accommodations for the various *languages*,—a technical term, denoting the classification of the members according to their respective nations; finally, in the embellishment of the capital, which vied in the splendor of its architecture with the finest cities of Christendom.

Yet, with this show of pomp and magnificence, the Knights of Rhodes did not sink into the enervating luxury which was charged on the Templars, nor did they engage in those worldly, ambitious schemes which provoked the jealousy of princes, and brought ruin on that proud order. In prosperity as in poverty, they were still true to the principles of their institution. Their galleys still spread over the Levant, and came back victorious from their *caravans*, as their cruises against the Moslems were termed. In every enterprise set on foot by the Christian powers against the enemies of the Faith, the red banner of St. John, with his eight-pointed cross of white, was still to be seen glittering in the front of battle. There is no example of a military institution having religion for

<sup>3</sup> For an account of the institutions of the order of St. John, see Helyot, *Ordres Religieux*, tom. ii. p. 58. et seq.; also the Old and

New Statutes, appended to vol. ii. of Vertot's *History of the Knights of Malta*.

its object which, under every change of condition, and for so many centuries, maintained so inflexibly the purity of its principles, and so conscientiously devoted itself to the great object for which it was created.

It was not to be expected that a mighty power, like that of the Turks, would patiently endure the existence of a petty enemy on its borders, which, if not formidable from extent of population and empire, like Venice, was even more annoying by its incessant hostilities, and its depredations on the Turkish commerce. More than one sultan, accordingly, hoping to rid themselves of the annoyance, fitted out expeditions against the island, with the design of crushing the hornets in their nest. But in every attempt they were foiled by the valor of this little band of Christian chivalry. At length, in 1522, Solyman the Second led an expedition in person against Rhodes. For six months the brave knights, with their own good swords, unaided by a single European power, withstood the whole array of the Ottoman Empire; and when at length compelled to surrender, they obtained such honorable terms from Solyman as showed he knew how to respect valor, though in a Christian foe.

Once more without a home, the Knights of St. John were abroad on the world. The European princes, affecting to consider the order as now extinct, prepared to confiscate whatever possessions it had in their several dominions. From this ruin it was saved by the exertions of L'Isle Adam, the grand-master, who showed, at this crisis, as much skill in diplomacy as he had before shown prowess in the field. He

visited the principal courts in person, and by his insinuating address, as well as arguments, not only turned the sovereigns from their purpose, but secured effectual aid for his unfortunate brethren. The pope offered them a temporary asylum in the papal territory; and Charles the Fifth was induced to cede to the order the island of Malta, and its dependencies, with entire jurisdiction over them, for their permanent residence.

Malta, which had been annexed by Charles's predecessors to Sicily, had descended to that monarch as part of the dominions of the crown of Aragon. In thus ceding it to the Knights of St. John, the politic prince consulted his own interests quite as much as those of the order. He drew no revenue from the rocky isle, but, on the contrary, was charged with its defence against the Moorish corsairs, who made frequent descents on the spot, wasting the country, and dragging off the miserable people into slavery. By this transfer of the island to the military order of St. John, he not only relieved himself of all further expense on its account, but secured a permanent bulwark for the protection of his own dominions.

It was wise in the emperor to consent that the gift should be burdened with no other condition than the annual payment of a falcon in token of his feudal supremacy. It was also stipulated, that the order should at no time bear arms against Sicily; a stipulation hardly necessary with men who, by their vows, were pledged to fight in defence of Christendom, and not against it.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The original deed of cession, Knights of Malta, vol. ii. p. 157.. in Latin, is published by Vertot, et seq.

In October, 1530, L'Isle Adam and his brave associates took possession of their new domain. Their hearts sunk within them, as their eyes wandered over the rocky expanse, forming a sad contrast to the beautiful "land of roses" which had so long been their abode.<sup>5</sup> But it was not very long before the wilderness before them was to blossom like the rose, under their diligent culture.<sup>6</sup> Earth was brought in large quantities, and at great cost, from Sicily. Terraces to receive it were hewn in the steep sides of the rock; and the soil, quickened by the ardent sun of Malta, was soon clothed with the glowing vegetation of the South. Still, it did not raise the grain necessary for the consumption of the island. This was regularly imported from Sicily, and stored in large pits or caverns, excavated in the rock, which, hermetically closed, preserved their contents unimpaired for years. In a short time, too, the island bristled with fortifications, which, combined with its natural defences, enabled its garrison to defy the attacks of the corsair. To these works was added the construction of suitable dwellings for the accommodation of the order. But

<sup>5</sup> "Rhodes," from the Greek *ῥόδον*. The origin of the name is referred by etymologists to the great quantity of roses which grew wild on the island. The name of *Malta* (*Melita*) is traced to the wild honey, *μέλι*, of most excellent flavor, found among its rocks.

<sup>6</sup> A recent traveller, after visiting both Rhodes and Malta, thus alludes to the change in the relative condition of the two islands. "We are told that, when L'Isle Adam and his brave companions first landed on this shore, their spirits sank within them at the contrast its dry and barren surface

presented to their delicious lost Rhodes; I have qualified myself for adjudging that in most respects the tables are now turned between the two islands, and they certainly afford a very decisive criterion of the results of Turkish and Christian dominion." The Earl of Carlisle's *Diary in Turkish and Greek Waters*, (Boston, 1855,) p. 204; — an unpretending volume, which bears on every page evidence of the wise and tolerant spirit, the various scholarship, and the sensibility to the beautiful, so characteristic of its noble author.

it was long after, and not until the land had been desolated by the siege on which we are now to enter, that it was crowned with the stately edifices that eclipsed those of Rhodes itself, and made Malta the pride of the Mediterranean.<sup>7</sup>

In their new position the knights were not very differently situated from what they had been in the Levant. They were still encamped amongst the infidel, with the watch-fires of the enemy blazing around them. Again their galleys sailed forth to battle with the corsairs, and returned laden with the spoils of victory. Still the white cross of St. John was to be seen in the post of danger. In all the expeditions of Charles the Fifth and Philip the Second against the Barbary Moors, from the siege of Tunis to the capture of Peñon de Velez, they bore a prominent part. With the bravery of the soldier, they combined the skill of the mariner; and on that disastrous day when the Christian navy was scattered before Algiers, the Maltese galleys were among the few that rode out the tempest.<sup>8</sup> It was not long be-

<sup>7</sup> For the account of Malta I am much indebted to Boisgelin, "Ancient and Modern Malta." This work gives the most complete view of Malta, both in regard to the natural history of the island and the military and political history of the order, that is to be found in any book with which I am acquainted. It is a large repository of facts crudely put together, with little to boast of on the score of its literary execution. It is interesting as the production of a Knight of St. John, one of the unhappy few who survived to witness the treachery of his brethren and the extinction of his order.

The last of the line, he may well be pardoned, if, in his survey of the glorious past, he should now and then sound the trumpet of glorification somewhat too loudly.

<sup>8</sup> "The galleys of the order alone resisted the fury of the waves; and when Charles the Fifth was told that some vessels appeared still to live at sea, he exclaimed, 'They must, indeed, be Maltese galleys which can outride such a tempest!' The high opinion he had formed of this fleet was fully justified; for the standard of the order was soon in sight." Boisgelin, *Ancient and Modern Malta*, vol. ii. p. 34.

fore the name of the Knights of Malta became as formidable on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, as that of the Knights of Rhodes had been in the East.

Occasionally their galleys, sweeping by the mouth of the Adriatic, passed into the Levant, and boldly encountered their old enemy on his own seas, even with odds greatly against them.<sup>9</sup> The Moors of the Barbary coast, smarting under the losses inflicted on them by their indefatigable foe, more than once besought the Sultan to come to their aid, and avenge the insults offered to his religion on the heads of the offenders. At this juncture occurred the capture of a Turkish galleon in the Levant. It was a huge vessel, richly laden, and defended by twenty guns and two hundred janizaries. After a desperate action, she was taken by the Maltese galleys, and borne off, a welcome prize, to the island. She belonged to the chief eunuch of the imperial harem, some of the fair inmates of which were said to have had an interest in the precious freight.<sup>10</sup> These persons now joined with the Moors in the demand for vengeance. Solyman shared in the general indignation at the insult offered to him under the walls, as it were, of his own capital; and he resolved to signalize the close of his reign by driving the knights from Malta, as he

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 61, et alibi.

<sup>10</sup> The value of the freight was estimated at more than 80,000 ducats. — "Se estimo la presa mas de ochenta mil ducados, de sedas de levante, y alombras y otras cosas, cada uno piense lo que se diria en la corte del Turco, sobre la perdi-

da desta nave tan poderosa, y tan rica." La Verdadera Relacion de todo lo que el Año de M.D.LXV. ha sucedido en la Isla de Malta, por Francisco Balbi de Correggio, en todo el Sitio Soldado (Barcelona, 1568), fol. 19.

had the commencement of it by driving them from Rhodes.

As it was not improbable that the Christian princes would rally in support of an order which had fought so many battles for Christendom, Solyman made his preparations on a formidable scale. Rumors of these spread far and wide; and, as their object was unknown, the great powers on the Mediterranean, each fancying that its own dominions might be the point of attack, lost no time in placing their coasts in a state of defence. The king of Spain sent orders to his viceroy in Sicily to equip such a fleet as would secure the safety of that island.

Meanwhile, the grand-master of Malta, by means of spies whom he secretly employed in Constantinople, received intelligence of the real purpose of the expedition. The post of grand-master, at this time, was held by Jean Parisot de la Valette, a man whose extraordinary character, no less than the circumstances in which he was placed, has secured him an imperishable name on the page of history. He was of an ancient family from the south of France, being of the *language* of Provence. He was now in the sixty-eighth year of his age.<sup>11</sup> In his youth he had witnessed the memorable siege of Rhodes, and had passed successively through every post in the order, from the humblest to the highest, which he now occupied. With large experience he combined a singular discretion, and an inflexible spirit, founded on entire devotion to the great cause in which he was engaged.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., fol. 17.

It was the conviction of this self-devotion which, in part, at least, may have given La Valette that ascendancy over the minds of his brethren, which was so important at a crisis like the present. It may have been the anticipation of such a crisis that led to his election as grand-master in 1557, when the darkness coming over the waters showed the necessity of an experienced pilot to weather the storm.

No sooner had the grand-master learned the true destination of the Turkish armament, than he sent his emissaries to the different Christian powers, soliciting aid for the order in its extremity. He summoned the knights absent in foreign lands to return to Malta, and take part with their brethren in the coming struggle. He imported large supplies of provisions and military stores from Sicily and Spain. He drilled the militia of the island, and formed an effective body of more than three thousand men; to which was added a still greater number of Spanish and Italian troops, raised for him by the knights who were abroad. This force was augmented by the extraordinary addition of five hundred galley-slaves, whom La Valette withdrew from the oar, promising to give them their freedom if they served him faithfully. Lastly, the fortifications were put in repair, strengthened with outworks, and placed in the best condition for resisting the enemy. All classes of the inhabitants joined in this work. The knights themselves took their part in the toilsome drudgery; and the grand-master did not disdain to labor with the humblest of his followers. He not only directed, but, as hands were wanted, he set the example of carrying

his own orders into execution. Wherever his presence was needed, he was to be found,—ministering to the sick, cheering the desponding, stimulating the indifferent, chiding the dilatory, watching over the interests of the little community intrusted to his care with parental solicitude.

While thus employed, La Valette received a visit from the Sicilian viceroy, Don Garcia de Toledo, the conqueror of Peñon de Velez. He came, by Philip's orders, to concert with the grand-master the best means of defence. He assured the latter that, so soon as he had assembled a fleet, he would come to his relief; and he left his natural son with him, to learn the art of war under so experienced a commander. La Valette was comforted by the viceroy's promises of succor. But he well knew that it was not to the promises of others he was to trust, in his present exigency, but to his own efforts and those of his brave companions.

The knights, in obedience to his call, had for the most part now arrived, each bringing with him a number of servants and other followers. Some few of the more aged and infirm remained behind; but this not so much from infirmity and age, as from the importance of having some of its members to watch over the interests of the community at foreign courts. La Valette was touched by the alacrity with which his brethren repaired to their posts, to stand by their order in the dark hour of its fortunes. He tenderly embraced them; and soon afterwards, calling them together, he discoursed with them on the perilous position in which they stood, with the whole strength

of the Moorish and Turkish empires mustering against them. "It was the great battle of the Cross and the Koran," he said, "that was now to be fought. They were the chosen soldiers of the Cross; and, if Heaven required the sacrifice of their lives, there could be no better time than this glorious occasion." The grand-master then led the way to the chapel of the convent, where he and his brethren, after devoutly confessing, partook of the sacrament, and, at the foot of the altar, solemnly renewed their vows to defend the Church against the infidel. With minds exalted by these spiritual exercises, all worldly interests seemed, from that moment, says their historian, to lose their hold on their affections. They stood like a company of martyrs, — the forlorn hope of Christendom, prepared, as their chief had said, to offer up their lives a sacrifice to the great cause in which they were engaged. Such were the feelings with which La Valette and his companions, having completed their preparations, now calmly awaited the coming of the enemy.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Vertot, *Knights of Malta*, vol. ii. pp. 192-195. — Sagredo, *Morarcas Othomanos*, p. 244. — Balbi, *Verdadera Relacion*, fol. 26. et seq. — Boisgelin, *Ancient and Modern*

*Malta*, vol. ii. pp. 71-73. — De Thou, *Hist. Universelle*, tom. v. pp. 51-53. — J. M. Calderon de la Barca, *Gloriosa Defensa de Malta*, (Madrid, 1796), p. 28.

## CHAPTER III.

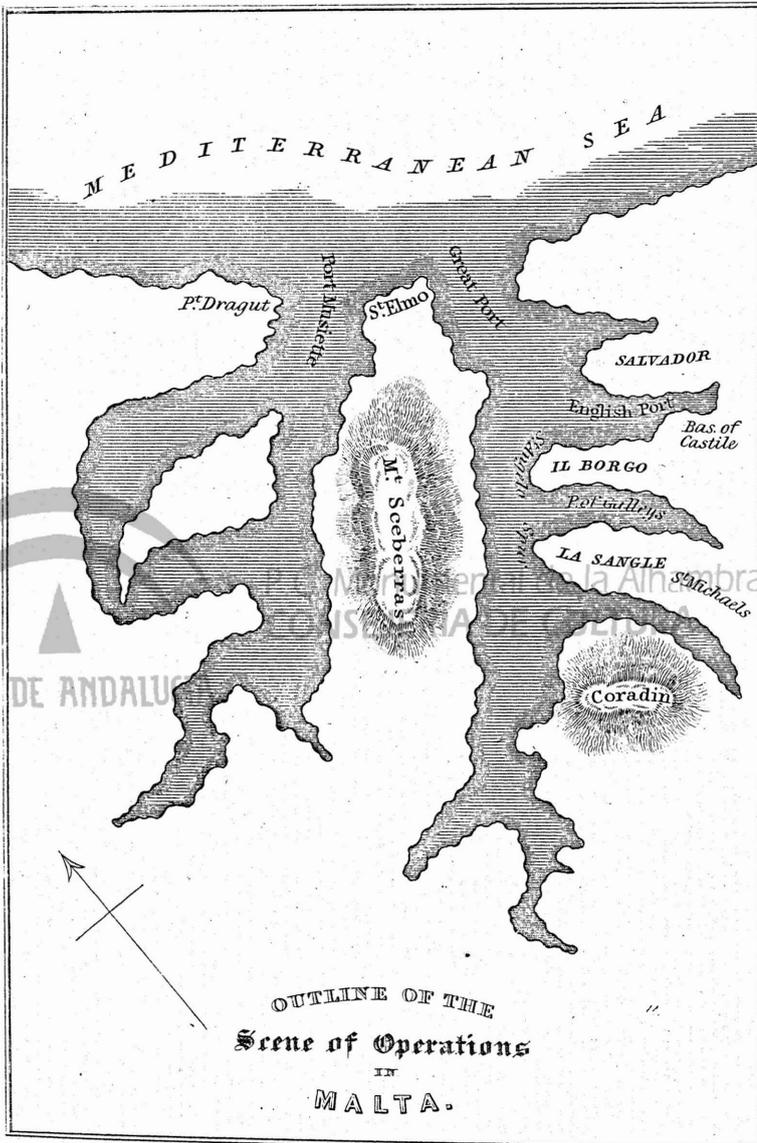
## SIEGE OF MALTA.

Condition of Malta. — Arrival of the Turks. — They reconnoitre the Island. — Siege of St. Elmo. — Its Heroic Defence. — Its Fall.

1565.

BEFORE entering on the particulars of this memorable siege, it will be necessary to make the reader somewhat acquainted with the country which was the scene of operations. The island of Malta is about seventeen miles long and nine broad. At the time of the siege it contained some twelve thousand inhabitants, exclusive of the members of the order. They were gathered, for the most part, into wretched towns and villages, the principal one of which was defended by a wall of some strength, and was dignified with the title of Civita Notable, — “Illustrious City.” As it was situated in the interior, near the centre of the island, the knights did not take up their residence there, but preferred the north-eastern part of Malta, looking towards Sicily, and affording a commodious harbor for their galleys.

The formation of the land in this quarter is very remarkable. A narrow, rocky promontory stretches out into the Mediterranean, dividing its waters into



London: Richard Bentley. 1855.

two small gulfs,—that on the west being called *Marza Musiette*, or Port Musiette, and that towards the east, which now bears the name of Valetta Harbor, being then known as the Great Port. The extreme point of the promontory was crowned by the Castle of St. Elmo, built by the order, soon after its arrival in the island, on the spot which commanded the entrance into both harbors. It was a fortress of considerable strength, for which it was chiefly indebted to its position. Planted on the solid rock, and washed, for the greater part of its circuit, by the waters of the Mediterranean, it needed no other defence on that quarter. But towards the land it was more open to an enemy; and, though protected by a dry ditch and a counterscarp, it was thought necessary to secure it still further, by means of a ravelin on the south-west, which La Valette had scarcely completed before the arrival of the Turks.

Port Musiette, on the west, is that in which vessels now perform quarantine. The Great Port was the most important; for round that was gathered the little community of knights. Its entrance, which is not more than a quarter of a mile in width, is commanded by two headlands, one of them crested, as above mentioned, by the fort of St. Elmo. The length of the harbor may be nearly two miles; and the water is of sufficient depth for ships of the greatest burden to ride there in security, sheltered within the encircling arms of the coast from the storms of the Mediterranean.

From the eastern side of this basin shoot out two projecting headlands, forming smaller harbors within

the Great Port. The most northerly of these strips of land was defended by the Castle of St. Angelo, round which clustered a little town, called by way of eminence *Il Borgo*, "The Burgh,"—now more proudly styled "The Victorious City." It was here that the order took up its residence,—the grand-masters establishing themselves in the castle; and great pains were taken to put the latter in a good state of defence, while the town was protected by a wall. On the parallel strip of land, known as the island of La Sangle, from a grand-master of that name, stood a fort, called the fort of St. Michael, with a straggling population gathered around it, now busily employed in strengthening the defences. Between the two headlands lay the Port of Galleys, serving, as its name imports, as a haven for the little navy of the order. This port was made more secure by an iron chain drawn across its entrance, from the extreme point of one headland to the other.

Such were the works constructed by the knights in the brief period during which they had occupied the island. They were so far imperfect, that many a commanding eminence, which the security of the country required to be strongly fortified, still remained as naked and exposed as at the time of their arrival. This imperfect state of its defences presented a strong contrast to the present condition of Malta, bristling all over with fortifications, which seem to form part of the living rock out of which they spring, and which, in the hands of a power that holds possession of the sea, might bid defiance to the world.

The whole force which La Valette could muster

in defence of the island amounted to about nine thousand men. This included seven hundred knights, of whom about six hundred had already arrived. The remainder were on their way, and joined him at a later period of the siege. Between three and four thousand were Maltese, irregularly trained, but who had already gained some experience of war in their contests with the Barbary corsairs. The rest of the army, with the exception of five hundred galley slaves, already noticed, and the personal followers of the knights, was made up of levies from Spain and Italy, who had come over to aid in the defence. The useless part of the population—the infirm and the aged—had for the most part been shipped off to Sicily. There still remained, however, numbers of women and children; and the former, displaying the heroic constancy which, in times of trouble, so often distinguishes the sex, did good service during the siege, by tending the sick and by cheering the flagging spirits of the soldier.<sup>1</sup>

This little army La Valette distributed on the several stations, assigning each to some one of the *languages*, or nations, that the spirit of emulation might work its effects on the chivalry of the order. The castle of St. Elmo was the point of first importance. It covered so contracted a piece of ground, that it scarcely afforded accommodation for a thousand men; and not more than eight hundred were

<sup>1</sup> Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. ii. p. 197. — Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 28. — The latter chronicler, who gives a catalogue of the forces, makes the total amount of fighting men not exceed six thou-

sand one hundred. He speaks, however, of an indefinite number besides these, including a thousand slaves, who in various ways contributed to the defence of the island.

shut up within its walls at the commencement of the siege.<sup>2</sup> Its dimensions did not admit of its being provided with magazines capable of holding any large quantity of provisions, or military stores, for which it was unfortunately obliged to rely on its communication with Il Borgo, the town across the harbor. The masonry of the fort was not in the best repute; though the works were lined with at least thirty pieces of artillery, looking chiefly towards the land. Its garrison, which usually amounted to sixty soldiers, was under the command of an aged knight, named De Broglio. The grand-master reinforced this body with sixty knights under the bailiff of Negropont, a veteran in whose well-tryed valor La Valette placed entire confidence. He was strengthened by two companies of foreign levies, under the command of a Spanish cavalier named La Cerda.<sup>3</sup>

Various other points were held by small detachments, with some one of the order at the head of each. But the strength of the force, including nearly all the remainder of the knights, was posted in the castle of St. Angelo and in the town at its base. Here, La Valette took his own station, as the spot which, by its central position, would enable him to watch over the interests of the whole. All was bustle in this quarter, as the people were busily employed in strengthening the defences of the town, and in razing buildings in the suburbs, which the grand-master feared might afford a lodgement to the enemy. In this work their

<sup>2</sup> "De modo que quando los turcos llegaron sobre sant Ermo, havia ochocientos hombres dentro

para pelear." Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., fol. 31.—Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. ii. p. 198.

labors were aided by a thousand slaves, taken from the prison, and chained together in couples.<sup>4</sup>

On the morning of the eighteenth of May, 1565, the Turkish fleet was descried by the sentinels of St. Elmo and St. Angelo, about thirty miles to the eastward, standing directly for Malta. A gun, the signal agreed on, was fired from each of the forts, to warn the inhabitants of the country to withdraw into their villages. The fleet amounted to one hundred and thirty royal galleys with fifty of lesser size, besides a number of transports with the cannon, ammunition, and other military stores.<sup>5</sup> The breaching artillery consisted of sixty-three guns, the smallest of which threw a ball of fifty-six pounds, and some few, termed *basilicas*, carried marble bullets of a hundred and twelve pounds' weight.<sup>6</sup> The Turks were celebrated for the enormous calibre of their guns, from a very early period; and they continued to employ those pieces long after they had given way, in the rest of Europe, to cannon of more moderate and manageable dimensions.

The number of soldiers on board, independently of the mariners, and including six thousand janizaries,

<sup>4</sup> "En este tiempo ya todos los esclavos assi de sant Juan como de particulares estauan en la carcel, que seria bien mil esclavos. Y quando los sacauan a trabajar a las postas adonde se trabajaua, los sacauan de dos en dos, asidos de vna cadena." Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 37.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 21. — Vertot says, of a hundred and sixty pounds' weight, (Knights of Malta, vol. ii. p. 202.) Yet even this was far surpassed by

the mammoth cannon employed by Mahomet at the siege of Constantinople, in the preceding century, which, according to Gibbon, threw stone bullets of six hundred pounds.

Since the above lines were written, even this achievement has been distanced by British enterprise. The "Times" informs us of some "monster guns," intended to be used in the Baltic, the minimum weight of whose shot is to be three cwt., and the maximum ten.

was about thirty thousand, — the flower of the Ottoman army.<sup>7</sup> Their appointments were on the most perfect scale, and everything was provided requisite for the prosecution of the siege. Never, probably, had there been seen so magnificent an armament in the waters of the Mediterranean. It was evident that Solyman was bent on the extermination of the order which he had once driven into exile, but which had now renewed its strength, and become the most formidable enemy of the Crescent.

The command of the expedition was intrusted to two officers. One of these, Piali, was the same admiral who defeated the Spaniards at Gelves. He had the direction of the naval operations. The land forces were given to Mustapha, a veteran nearly seventy years of age, whose great experience, combined with military talents of a high order, had raised him to the head of his profession. Unfortunately, his merits as an officer were tarnished by his cruelty. Besides the command of the army, he had a general authority over the whole expedition, which excited the jealousy of Piali, who thought himself injured by the preference given to his rival. Thus feelings of mutual distrust arose in the bosoms of the two chiefs, which to some extent paralyzed the operations of each.

The Turkish armada steered for the south-eastern quarter of the island, and cast anchor in the port of St. Thomas. The troops speedily disembarked, and

<sup>7</sup> Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 26. — The old soldier goes into the composition of the Turkish force,

in the general estimate of which he does not differ widely from Vertot.

spread themselves in detached bodies over the land, devastating the country, and falling on all stragglers whom they met in the fields. Mustapha, with the main body of the army, marching a short distance into the interior, occupied a rising ground, only a few miles from Il Borgo. It was with difficulty that the inhabitants could be prevented from issuing from the gates, in order to gaze on the show presented by the invaders, whose magnificent array stretched far beyond the hills, with their bright arms and banners glittering in the sun, and their warlike music breathing forth notes of defiance to the Christians. La Valette, in his turn, caused the standard of St. John to be unfurled from the ramparts of the castle, and his trumpets to answer in a similar strain of defiance to that of the enemy.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile the grand marshal, Coppier, had sallied from the town at the head of a small troop, and fallen upon some of the detachments which were scouring the country. The success of his arms was shown by the gory heads of the slaughtered Turks, which he sent back to Il Borgo as the trophies of victory.<sup>9</sup> La Valette's design, in permitting these encounters, was to familiarize his men with the novel aspect and peculiar weapons of their enemies, as well as with the fierce war-cries which the Turks raised in battle. But the advantages gained in these skirmishes did not compensate the losses, however light, on the part of the Christians; and after two knights and a number of the common file had been slain, the grand-master

<sup>8</sup> Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., ubi supra.

ordered his followers to remain quietly within the walls of the town.

It was decided, in the Turkish council of war, to begin operations with the siege of the castle of St. Elmo; as the possession of this place was necessary to secure a safe harbor for the Turkish fleet. On the twenty-fourth of May, the trenches were opened, — if that can be said where, from the rocky, impenetrable nature of the ground, no trenches could be dug, and the besiegers were obliged to shelter themselves behind a breastwork formed of planks, having the space between them filled with earth brought from a distance, and held together by straw and rushes. At certain intervals Mustapha indicated the points for batteries. The principal of these was a battery where ten guns were mounted, some of them of the largest calibre; and although artillery practice was very different from what it is in our times, with so much greater experience and more manageable engines, yet masonry stronger than that of St. Elmo might well have crumbled under the masses of stone and iron that were now hurled against it.

As the works began to give way, it seemed evident that the garrison must rely more on their own strength than on that of their defences. It was resolved, therefore, to send to the grand-master and request reinforcements. The Chevalier de la Cerda was intrusted with the mission. Crossing over to Il Borgo, he presented himself before La Valette, and insisted on the necessity of further support if the fort was to be maintained against the infidel. The grand-master listened, with a displeasure which

he could not conceal, to this application for aid so early in the siege; especially as it was made in the presence of many of the knights, who might well be disheartened by it. He coldly asked La Cerda what loss the garrison had suffered. The knight, evading the question, replied, that St. Elmo was in the condition of a sick man who requires the aid of the physician. "I will be the physician," said La Valette, "and will bring such aid that, if I cannot cure your fears, I may at least hope to save the place from falling into the hands of the enemy." So impressed was he with the importance of maintaining this post to the last extremity, if it were only to gain time for the Sicilian succors, that he was prepared, as he said, to throw himself into the fortress, and, if need were, to bury himself in its ruins.

From this desperate resolution he was dissuaded by the unanimous voice of the knights, who represented to him that it was not the duty of the commander-in-chief to expose himself like a common soldier, and take his place in the forlorn hope. The grand-master saw the justice of these remonstrances; and, as the knights contended with one another for the honor of assuming the post of danger, he allowed fifty of the order, together with two companies of soldiers, to return with La Cerda to the fort. The reinforcement was placed under command of the Chevalier de Medran, a gallant soldier, on whose constancy and courage La Valette knew he could rely. Before its departure, the strength of the force was increased by the arrival of several knights from Sicily, who obtained the grand-master's leave to share

the fortunes of their brethren in St. Elmo. The troops were sent across the harbor, together with supplies of food and ammunition, in open boats, under cover of a heavy fire from the guns of St. Angelo. A shot happened to fall on a stone near the trenches, in which Piali, the Turkish admiral, was standing; and, a splinter striking him on the head, he was severely, though not mortally wounded. La Valette took advantage of the confusion created by this incident to despatch a galley to Sicily, to quicken the operations of the viceroy, and obtain from him the promised succors. To this Don Garcia de Toledo replied by an assurance that he should come to his relief by the middle of June.<sup>10</sup>

It was now the beginning of that month. Scarcely had De Medran entered St. Elmo, when he headed a sally against the Turks, slew many in the trenches, and put the remainder to flight. But they soon returned in such overwhelming force as compelled the Christians to retreat and take refuge within their works. Unfortunately, the smoke of the musketry, borne along by a southerly breeze, drifted in the direction of the castle; and under cover of it, the Turks succeeded in getting possession of the counter-scarp. As the smoke cleared away, the garrison were greatly dismayed at seeing the Moslem standard planted on their own defences. It was in vain they made every effort to recover them. The assailants, speedily intrenching themselves behind a parapet

<sup>10</sup> Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 37. et seq. — Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. ii. pp. 200-202. —

Calderon, Gloriosa Defensa de Malta, p. 42. — Cabrera, Filipe Segundo, lib. vi. cap. 24.

formed of gabions, fascines, and wool-sacks, established a permanent lodgement on the counterscarp.

From this point, they kept up a lively discharge of musketry on the ravelin, killing such of its defenders as ventured to show themselves. An untoward event soon put them in possession of the ravelin itself. A Turkish engineer, reconnoitring that outwork from the counterscarp, is said to have perceived a sentinel asleep on his post. He gave notice to his countrymen; and a party of janizaries succeeded, by means of their ladders, in scaling the walls of the ravelin. The guard, though few in number and taken by surprise, still endeavored to maintain the place. A sharp skirmish ensued. But the Turks, speedily reinforced by their comrades, who flocked to their support, overpowered the Christians, and forced them to give way. Some few succeeded in effecting their retreat into the castle.

The janizaries followed close on the fugitives. For a moment it seemed as if Moslem and Christian would both be hurried along by the tide of battle into the fort itself. But fortunately the bailiff of Negropont, De Medran, and some other cavaliers, heading their followers, threw themselves on the enemy, and checked the pursuit. A desperate struggle ensued, in which science was of no avail, and victory waited on the strongest. In the end the janizaries were forced to retreat in their turn. Every inch of ground was contested; until the Turks, pressed hard by their adversaries, fell back into the ravelin, where, with the aid of their comrades, they made a resolute stand against the Christians. Two

cannon of the fortress were now brought to bear on the outwork. But, though their volleys told with murderous effect, the Turks threw themselves into the midst of the fire, and fearlessly toiled, until, by means of gabions, sand-bags, and other materials, they had built up a parapet which secured them from annoyance. All further contest was rendered useless; and the knights, abandoning this important outwork to the assailants, sullenly withdrew into the fortress.<sup>11</sup>

While this was going on, a fresh body of Turks, bursting into the ditch, through a breach in the counterscarp, endeavored to carry the fortress by escalade. Fortunately, their ladders were too short; and the garrison, plying them with volleys of musketry, poured down, at the same time, such a torrent of missiles on their heads as soon strewed the ditch with mangled limbs and carcasses. At this moment a party, sallying from the fort, fell on the enemy with great slaughter, and drove them—such as were in condition to fly—back into their trenches.

The engagement, brought on, as we have seen, by accident, lasted several hours. The loss of the Turks greatly exceeded that of the garrison, which amounted to less than a hundred men, twenty of whom were members of the order. But the greatest loss of the besieged was that of the counterscarp and ravelin. Thus

<sup>11</sup> In Vertot's account of this affair, much is said of a non-descript outwork, termed a *cavalier*,—conveying a different idea from what is understood by that word in modern fortifications. It stood without the walls, and was connected with the ravelin by a bridge, the possession of which was hotly

contested by the combatants. Balbi, the Spanish soldier, so often quoted,—one of the actors in the siege, though stationed at the fort of St. Michael,—speaks of the fight as being carried on in the ditch. His account has the merit of being at once the briefest and the most intelligible.

shorn of its outworks, the castle of St. Elmo stood like some bare and solitary trunk exposed to all the fury of the tempest.<sup>12</sup>

The loss of the ravelin gave the deepest concern to La Valette, which was not mitigated by the consideration that it was to be charged, in part at least, on the negligence of its defenders. It made him the more solicitous to provide for the security of the castle; and he sent his boats over to remove the wounded; and replace them by an equal number of able-bodied knights and soldiers. It was his intention that the garrison should not be encumbered with any who were unable to assist in the defence. Among the new recruits was the Chevalier de Miranda, — one of the most illustrious members of the order, who had lately arrived from Sicily, — a soldier whose personal authority, combined with great military knowledge, proved eminently useful to the garrison.

The loss which the besiegers had sustained in the late encounter was more than counterbalanced by the arrival, at this time, of Dragut, the famous pasha of Tripoli, with thirteen Moorish galleys. He was welcomed by salvos of artillery and the general rejoicing of the army; and this not so much on account of the reinforcement which he brought — the want of which was not then felt — as of his reputation; for he was no less celebrated as an engineer than as a naval commander. The sultan, who had the highest opinion

<sup>12</sup> Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 40, 41. — Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. ii. pp. 203-205. — Calderon, Gloriosa Defensa de Malta, p. 48. et seq. — Segrado, Monarcas

Othomanos, p. 245. — Cabrera, Filipe Segundo, lib. vi. cap. 24. — Herrera, Historia General, lib. xii. cap. 4.

of his merits, had ordered his generals to show him the greatest deference; and they, at once, advised with him as to the best means of prosecuting the siege. The effect of his counsel was soon seen in the more judicious and efficient measures that were adopted. A battery of four culverins was established on the western headland commanding the entrance of Port Musiette. It was designed to operate on the western flank of the fortress; and the point of land on which it stood is still known by the name of the redoubtable corsair.

Another battery, much more formidable from the number and size of the pieces, was raised on an eminence to the south of St. Elmo, and played both upon that fort and upon the castle of St. Angelo. The counterscarp of the former fortress was shaved away, so as to allow a free range to the artillery of the besiegers<sup>13</sup>; and two cannon were planted on the ravelin, which directed a searching fire on the interior of the fortress, compelling the garrison to shelter themselves behind retrenchments constructed under the direction of Miranda.<sup>14</sup>

The artillery of the Turks now opened with dreadful effect, as they concentrated their fire on the naked walls of St. Elmo. No masonry could long withstand the tempest of iron and ponderous marble shot which was hurled from the gigantic engines of the besiegers. Fragments of the wall fell off as if it had been made of plaster; and St. Elmo trembled to

<sup>13</sup> Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 39.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., fol. 39-42. — Calderon, Gloriosa Defensa de Malta, p. 46.

—De Thou, Hist. Universelle, tom. v. p. 58. — Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. ii. p. 204. — Miniana, Hist. de España, p. 350.

its foundations under the thunders of the terrible ordnance. The heart of the stoutest warrior might well have faltered as he saw the rents each day growing wider and wider, as if gaping to give entrance to the fierce multitude that was swarming at the gates.

In this extremity, with the garrison wasted by the constant firing of the enemy, worn down by excessive toil, many of the knights wounded, all of them harassed by long-protracted vigils, it was natural that the greater part should feel they had done all that duty required of them, and that, without loss of honor, they might retire from a post that was no longer tenable. They accordingly resolved to apply to the grand-master to send his boats at once to transport them and the rest of the garrison to Il Borgo. The person whom they chose for the mission was the Chevalier de Medran, who, as La Valette would know, was not likely to exaggerate the difficulties of their situation.

De Medran accordingly crossed the harbor, and, in an interview with the grand-master, explained the purpose of his visit. He spoke of the dilapidated state of the fortifications, and dwelt on the forlorn condition of the garrison, which was only to be sustained by constant reinforcements from Il Borgo. But this was merely another mode of consuming the strength of the order. It would be better, therefore, instead of prolonging a desperate defence, which must end in the ruin of the defenders, to remove them at once to the town, where they could make common cause with their brethren against the enemy.

La Valette listened attentively to De Medran's

arguments, which were well deserving of consideration. But, as the affair was of the last importance to the interests of his little community, he chose to lay it before the council of *Grand Crosses*, — men who filled the highest stations in the order. They were unanimously of the same opinion as De Medran. Not so was La Valette. He felt that with the maintenance of St. Elmo was connected the very existence of the order. The viceroy of Sicily, he told his brethren, had declared that, if this strong post were in the hands of the enemy, he would not hazard his master's fleet there to save the island. And, next to their own good swords, it was on the Sicilian succors that they must rely. The knights must maintain the post at all hazards. The viceroy could not abandon them in their need. He himself would not desert them. He would keep them well supplied with whatever was required for their defence; and, if necessary, would go over and take the command in person, and make good the place against the infidel, or die in the breach.

The elder knights, on learning the grand-master's decision, declared their resolution to abide by it. They knew how lightly he held his life in comparison with the cause to which it was consecrated; and they avowed their determination to shed the last drop of their blood in defence of the post intrusted to them. The younger brethren were not so easily reconciled to the decision of their superiors. To remain there longer was a wanton sacrifice of life, they said. They were penned up in the fort, like sheep, tamely waiting to be devoured by the fierce wolves that were

thirsting for their blood. This they could not endure; and, if the grand-master did not send to take them off at once, they would sally out against the enemy, and find an honorable death on the field of battle. A letter signed by fifty of the knights, expressing their determination, was accordingly despatched by one of their number to Il Borgo.

La Valette received the communication with feelings in which sorrow was mingled with indignation. It was not enough, he said, for them to die the honorable death which they so much coveted. They must die in the manner he prescribed. They were bound to obey his commands. He reminded them of the vows taken at the time of their profession, and the obligation of every loyal knight to sacrifice his life, if necessary, for the good of the order. Nor would they gain anything, he added, by abandoning their post and returning to the town. The Turkish army would soon be at its gates, and the viceroy of Sicily would leave them to their fate.

That he might not appear, however, to pass too lightly by their remonstrances, La Valette determined to send three commissioners to inspect St. Elmo, and report on its condition. This would at least have the advantage of gaining time, when every hour gained was of importance. He also sent to Sicily to remonstrate on the tardiness of the viceroy's movements, and to urge the necessity of immediate succors if he would save the castle.

The commissioners were received with joy by the refractory knights, whom they found so intent on their departure that they were already beginning to

throw the shot into the wells, to prevent its falling into the hands of the Turks. They eagerly showed the commissioners every part of the works, the ruinous condition of which, indeed, spoke more forcibly than the murmurs of the garrison. Two of the body adopted the views of the disaffected party, and pronounced the fort no longer tenable. But the third, an Italian cavalier, named Castriot, was of a different way of thinking. The fortifications, he admitted, were in a bad state; but it was far from a desperate one. With fresh troops and the materials that could be furnished from the town, they might soon be put in condition to hold out for some time longer. Such an opinion, so boldly avowed, in opposition to the complaints of the knights, touched their honor. A hot dispute arose between the parties; and evil consequences might have ensued, had not the commander, De Broglio, and the bailiff of Negropont, to stop the tumult, caused the alarm-bell to be rung, which sent every knight to his post.

Castriot, on his return, made a similar report to the grand-master, and boldly offered to make good his words. If La Valette would allow him to muster a force, he would pass over to St. Elmo, and put it in condition still to hold out against the Ottoman arms.

La Valette readily assented to a proposal which he may perhaps have originally suggested. No compulsion was to be used in a service of so much danger. But volunteers speedily came forward, knights, soldiers, and inhabitants of both town and country. The only difficulty was in making the selection. All

eagerly contended for the glory of being enrolled in this little band of heroes.

La Valette was cheered by the exhibition of this generous spirit in his followers. It gave assurance of success stronger than was to be derived from any foreign aid. He wrote at once to the discontented knights in St. Elmo, and informed them of what had been done. Their petition was now granted. They should be relieved that very evening. They had only to resign their posts to their successors. "Return, my brethren," he concluded, "to the convent. There you will be safe for the present; and I shall have less apprehension for the fate of the fortress, on which the preservation of the island so much depends."

The knights, who had received some intimation of the course the affair was taking in Il Borgo, were greatly disconcerted by it. To surrender to others the post committed to their own keeping, would be a dishonor they could not endure. When the letter of the grand-master arrived, their mortification was extreme; and it was not diminished by the cool and cutting contempt but thinly veiled under a show of solicitude for their personal safety. They implored the bailiff of Negropont to write in their name to La Valette, and beseech him not to subject them to such a disgrace. They avowed their penitence for the course they had taken, and only asked that they might now be allowed to give such proofs of devotion to the cause as should atone for their errors.

The letter was despatched by a swimmer across the harbor. But the grand-master coldly answered, that veterans without subordination were in his eyes of

less worth than raw recruits who submitted to discipline. The wretchedness of the knights at this repulse was unspeakable; for in their eyes dishonor was far worse than death. In their extremity they addressed themselves again to La Valette, renewing their protestations of sorrow for the past, and in humble terms requesting his forgiveness. The chief felt that he had pushed the matter far enough. It was perhaps the point to which he had intended to bring it. It would not be well to drive his followers to despair. He felt now they might be trusted. He accordingly dismissed the levies, retaining only a part of these brave men to reinforce the garrison; and with them he sent supplies of ammunition, and materials for repairing the battered works.<sup>15</sup>

During this time, the Turkish commander was pressing the siege with vigor. Day and night, the batteries thundered on the ramparts of the devoted fortress. The ditch was strewn with fragments torn from the walls by the iron tempest; and a yawning chasm, which had been gradually opening on the southwestern side of the castle, showed that a practicable breach was at length effected. The uncommon vivacity with which the guns played through the whole of the 15th of June, and the false alarms with which the garrison was harassed on the following night, led to the belief that a general assault was im-

<sup>15</sup> For the preceding pages, setting forth the embassies to La Valette, and exhibiting in such bold relief the character of the grand-master, I have been chiefly indebted to Vertot (*Knights of Malta*, vol. i. pp. 309-312.). The same story is told, more concisely, by Calde-

ron, *Gloriosa Defensa de Malta*, pp. 60-67.; Cabrera, *Filipe Segundo*, lib. vi. cap. 25.; De Thou, *Hist. Universelle*, tom. v. p. 61.; Campana, *Filippo Secondo*, par. ii. p. 159.; Balbi, *Verdadera Relacion*, fol. 44, 45.

mediately intended. The supposition was correct. On the 16th, at dawn, the whole force of the besiegers was under arms. The appointed signal was given by the discharge of a cannon; when a numerous body of janizaries, formed into column, moved swiftly forward to storm the great breach of the castle.

Meanwhile the Ottoman fleet, having left its anchorage on the eastern side of the island, had moved round, and now lay off the mouth of the Great Port, where its heavy guns were soon brought to bear on the seaward side of St. Elmo. The battery on Point Dragut opened on the western flank of the fortress; and four thousand musketeers in the trenches swept the breach with showers of bullets, and picked off those of the garrison who showed their heads above the parapet.

The guns of the besieged, during this time, were not idle. They boldly answered the cannonade of the vessels; and on the land side the play of artillery and musketry was incessant. The besieged now concentrated their aim on the formidable body of janizaries, who, as already noticed, were hurrying forward to the assault. Their leading files were mowed down, and their flank cruelly torn, by the cannon of St. Angelo, at less than half a mile's distance. But though staggered by this double fire on front and flank, the janizaries were not stayed in their career, nor even thrown into disarray. Heedless of those who fell, the dark column came steadily on, like a thunder-cloud; while the groans of the dying were drowned in the loud battle-cries with which their comrades rushed to the assault. The fosse,

choked up with the ruins of the ramparts, afforded a bridge to the assailants, who had no need of the fascines with which their pioneers were prepared to fill up the chasm. The approach to the breach, however, was somewhat steep; and the breach itself was defended by a body of knights and soldiers, who poured volleys of musketry thick as hail on the assailants. Still they pushed forward through the storm, and, after a fierce struggle, the front rank found itself at the summit, face to face with its enemies. But the strength of the Turks was nearly exhausted by their efforts. They were hewn down by the Christians, who came fresh into action. Yet others succeeded those who fell; till, thus outnumbered, the knights began to lose ground, and the forces were more equally matched. Then came the struggle of man against man, where each party was spurred on by the fury of religious hate, and Christian and Moslem looked to paradise as the reward of him who fell in battle against the infidel. No mercy was asked; none was shown; and long and hard was the conflict between the flower of the Moslem soldiery and the best knights of Christendom. In the heat of the fight an audacious Turk planted his standard on the rampart. But it was speedily wrenched away by the Chevalier de Medran, who cut down the Musulman, and at the same moment received a mortal wound from an arquebuse.<sup>16</sup> As the contest lasted

<sup>16</sup> The remains of Medran were brought over to Il Borgo, where La Valette, from respect to his memory, caused them to be laid among those of the Grand Crosses. —“El gran Maestre lo mando en-

terrar en una sepultura, adonde se entierran los cavalleros dela gran Cruz, porque esta era la mayor honra, que en tal tiempo le podia hazer, y el muy bien la merecia.” Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 51.