

far into the day, the heat became intense, and added sorely to the distress of the combatants. Still neither party slackened their efforts. Though several times repulsed, the Turks returned to the assault with the same spirit as before; and when sabre and scymitar were broken, the combatants closed with their daggers, and rolled down the declivity of the breach, struggling in mortal conflict with each other.

While the work of death was going on in this quarter, a vigorous attempt was made in another to carry the fortress by escalade. A body of Turks, penetrating into the fosse, raised their ladders against the walls, and, pushed forward by their comrades in the rear, endeavored to force an ascent, under a plunging fire of musketry from the garrison. Fragments of rock, logs of wood, ponderous iron shot, were rolled over the parapet, mingled with combustibles and hand-grenades, which, exploding as they descended, shattered the ladders, and hurled the mangled bodies of the assailants on the rocky bottom of the ditch. In this contest one invention proved of singular use to the besieged. It was furnished them by La Valette, and consisted of an iron hoop, wound round with cloth steeped in nitre and bituminous substances, which, when ignited, burned with inextinguishable fury. These hoops, thrown on the assailants, inclosed them in their fiery circles. Sometimes two were thus imprisoned in the same hoop; and, as the flowing dress of the Turks favored the conflagration, they were speedily wrapped in a blaze which scorched them severely, if it did not

burn them to death.¹⁷ This invention, so simple, — and rude, as in our day it might be thought, — was so disastrous in its effects, that it was held in more dread by the Turks than any other of the fireworks employed by the besieged.

A similar attempt to scale the walls was made on the other side of the castle, but was defeated by a well-directed fire from the guns of St. Angelo across the harbor, — which threw their shot with such precision as to destroy most of the storming party, and compel the rest to abandon their design.¹⁸ Indeed, during the whole of the assault, the artillery of St. Angelo, St. Michael, and Il Borgo kept up so irritating a fire on the exposed flank and rear of the enemy as greatly embarrassed his movements, and did good service to the besieged.

Thus the battle raged along the water and on the land. The whole circuit of the Great Port was studded with fire. A din of hideous noises rose in the air; the roar of cannon, the rattle of musketry, the hissing of fiery missiles, the crash of falling masonry, the shrieks of the dying, and, high above all, the fierce cries of those who struggled for mastery! To add to the tumult, in the heat of the fight, a spark falling into the magazine of combustibles in the fortress, it blew up with a tremendous explosion, drowning every other

¹⁷ The invention of this missile Vertot claims for La Valette. (Knights of Malta, vol. ii. p. 215.) Balbi refers it to a brother of the Order, named Ramon Fortunii. (Verdaderi Relacion, p. 48.)

¹⁸ The first shot was not so successful, killing eight of their own side! — “Mas el artillero, o fuesse

la prissa, o fuesse la turbacion que en semejantes casos suele sobre venir en los hombres el se tuvo mas a mano drecha, que no deviera, pues de aquel tiro mato ocho de los nuestros que defendian aquella posta.” Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 50.

noise, and for a moment stilling the combat. A cloud of smoke and vapor, rising into the air, settled heavily, like a dark canopy, above St. Elmo. It seemed as if a volcano had suddenly burst from the peaceful waters of the Mediterranean, belching out volumes of fire and smoke, and shaking the island to its centre!

The fight had lasted for some hours; and still the little band of Christian warriors made good their stand against the overwhelming odds of numbers. The sun had now risen high in the heavens, and as its rays beat fiercely on the heads of the assailants, their impetuosity began to slacken. At length, faint with heat and excessive toil, and many staggering under wounds, it was with difficulty that the janizaries could be brought back to the attack; and Mustapha saw with chagrin that St. Elmo was not to be won that day. Soon after noon, he gave the signal to retreat; and the Moslem host, drawing off under a galling fire from the garrison, fell back in sullen silence into their trenches, as the tiger, baffled in his expected prey, takes refuge from the spear of the hunter in his jungle.¹⁹

As the Turks withdrew, the garrison of St. Elmo raised a shout of victory that reached across the waters, and was cheerily answered from both St. Angelo and the town, whose inhabitants had watched with intense interest the current of the fight, on the result of which their own fate so much depended.

The number of Moslems who perished in the assault can only be conjectured. But it must have been very

¹⁹ Ibid., fol. 49-51.—Calderon, *Gloriosa Defensa de Malta*, p. 72. et seq.—Vertot, *Knights of Malta*, vol. ii. pp. 214-216.—

Cabrera, *Filipe Segundo*, lib. vi. cap. 25.—Sagredo, *Monarcas Othomanos*, p. 245.—Herrera, *Historia General*, lib. xii. cap. 6.

large. That of the garrison is stated as high as three hundred men. Of these, seventeen were knights of the order. But the common soldier, it was observed, did his duty as manfully throughout the day as the best knight by whose side he fought.²⁰ Few, if any, of the survivors escaped without wounds. Such as were badly injured were transferred at once to the town, and an equal number of able-bodied troops sent to replace them, together with supplies of ammunition, and materials for repairing, as far as possible, the damage to the works. Among those who suffered most from their wounds was the bailiff of Negropont. He obstinately refused to be removed to the town; and when urged by La Valette to allow a substitute to be sent to relieve him, the veteran answered, that he was ready to yield up his command to any one who should be appointed in his place; but he trusted he should be allowed still to remain in St. Elmo, and shed the last drop of his blood in defence of the Faith.²¹

A similar heroic spirit was shown in the competition of the knights, and even of the Maltese soldiers, to take the place of those who had fallen in the fortress. It was now not merely the post of danger, but, as might be truly said, the post of death. Yet these brave men eagerly contended for it, as for the palm of glory; and La Valette was obliged to refuse the

²⁰ "En este assalto y en todos me han dicho cavalleros, que pelearõ no solamente ellos, y los soldados, mas que los forçados, bonas vallas, y Malteses murieron con tanto animo, como qualquiera otra persona de mayor estima." Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 51.

²¹ "Que si su señoria Illustrissima tenia otra persona, para tal cargo mejor, q̃ la embiase, quel lo obedeceria como a tal, mas quel queria quedar en sant Ermõ, como privado cavallero, y por sa religion sacrificar su cuerpo." Ibid., fol. 44.

application of twelve knights of the *language* of Italy, on the ground that the complement of the garrison was full.

The only spark of hope now left was that of receiving the succors from Sicily. But the viceroy, far from quickening his movements, seemed willing to play the part of the *matador* in one of his national bull-fights, — allowing the contending parties in the arena to exhaust themselves in the struggle, and reserving his own appearance till a single thrust from his sword should decide the combat.

Still, some chance of prolonging its existence remained to St. Elmo while the communication could be maintained with St. Angelo and the town, by means of which the sinking strength of the garrison was continually renewed with the fresh life-blood that was poured into its veins. The Turkish commander at length became aware that, if he would end the siege, this communication must be cut off. It would have been well for him had he come to this conclusion sooner.

By the advice of Dragut, the investment of the castle was to be completed by continuing the lines of intrenchment to the Great Port, where a battery mounted with heavy guns would command the point of debarkation. While conducting this work, the Moorish captain was wounded on the head, by the splinter from a rock struck by a cannon-shot, which laid him senseless in the trenches. Mustapha, commanding a cloak to be thrown over the fallen chief, had him removed to his tent. The wound proved mortal; and though Dragut survived to learn the

fate of St. Elmo, he seems to have been in no condition to aid the siege by his counsels. The loss of this able captain was the severest blow that could have been inflicted on the besiegers.

While the intrenchments were in progress, the enemy kept up an unintermitting fire on the tottering ramparts of the fortress. This was accompanied by false alarms, and by night attacks, in which the flaming missiles, as they shot through the air, cast a momentary glare over the waters, that showed the dark outlines of St. Elmo towering in ruined majesty above the scene of desolation. The artillery-men of St. Angelo, in the obscurity of the night, were guided in their aim by the light of the enemy's fireworks.²² These attacks were made by the Turks, not so much in the expectation of carrying the fort, though they were often attended with a considerable loss of life, as for the purpose of wearing out the strength of the garrison. And dreary indeed was the condition of the latter: fighting by day, toiling through the live-long night to repair the ravages in the works, they had no power to take either the rest or the nourishment necessary to recruit their exhausted strength. To all this was now to be added a feeling of deeper despondency, as they saw the iron band closing around them which was to sever them for ever from their friends.

On the eighteenth of the month, the work of in-

²² "La escuridad de la noche, fue luego muy clara, por la grãde cãtidad delos fuegos artificiales, que de ambas partes se arojavan, y de tal manera que los que estavamos

en san Miguel, veyamos muy claramente sant Ermo, y los artilleros de sant Angel y de otras partes apuntavan, a la lumbre de los fuegos enemigos." Ibid., fol. 48.

vestment was completed, and the extremity of the lines was garnished with a redoubt mounting two large guns, which, with the musketry from the trenches, would sweep the landing-place, and effectually cut off any further supplies from the other side of the harbor. Thus left to their own resources, the days of the garrison were numbered.

La Valette, who had anxiously witnessed these operations of the enemy, had done all he could to retard them, by firing incessantly on the laborers in the hope of driving them from the trenches. When the work was completed, his soul was filled with anguish; and his noble features, which usually wore a tinge of melancholy, were clouded with deeper sadness, as he felt he must now abandon his brave comrades to their fate.

On the twentieth of the month was the festival of Corpus Christi, which, in happier days, had been always celebrated with great pomp by the Hospitallers. They did not fail to observe it, even at this time. A procession was formed, with the grand-master at its head; and the knights walked clad in the dark robes of the order, embroidered with the white cross of Malta. They were accompanied by the whole population of the place, men, women, and children. They made the circuit of the town, taking the direction least exposed to the enemy's fire. On reaching the church, they prostrated themselves on the ground, and, with feelings rendered yet more solemn by their own situation, and above all by that of their brave comrades in St. Elmo, they implored the Lord of Hosts to take pity on their distress, and

not to allow his enemies to triumph over the true soldiers of the Cross.²³

During the whole of the twenty-first, the fire of the besiegers was kept up with more than usual severity, until in some places the crumbling wall was shot away, down to the bare rock on which it stood.²⁴ Their pioneers, who had collected loads of brushwood for the purpose, filled up the ditch with their fascines; which, as they were covered with wet earth, defied the efforts of the garrison to set them on fire. Throughout the following night a succession of false alarms kept the soldiers constantly under arms. All this prognosticated a general assault. It came the next day.

With the earliest streak of light, the Turkish troops were in motion. Soon they came pouring in over the fosse, which, choked up as it was, offered no impediment. Some threw themselves on the breach. The knights and their followers were there to receive them. Others endeavored to scale the ramparts, but were driven back by showers of missiles. The musketry was feeble, for ammunition had begun to fail. But everywhere the assailants were met with the same unconquerable spirit as before. It seemed as if the defenders of St. Elmo, exhausted as they had been by their extraordinary sufferings, had renewed their strength as by a miracle. Thrice the enemy returned to the assault; and thrice he was repulsed. The carnage was terrible; Christian and Mussulman grappling fiercely together, until the ruins on which

²³ Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 53.

²⁴ Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. ii. p. 214.

they fought were heaped with the bodies of the slain.

The combat had lasted several hours. Amazed at the resistance which he met with from this handful of warriors, Mustapha felt that, if he would stop the waste of life in his followers, he must defer the possession of the place for one day longer. Stunned as his enemies must be by the blow he had now dealt, it would be beyond the powers of nature for them to stand another assault. He accordingly again gave the signal for retreat; and the victors again raised the shout — a feeble shout — of triumph; while the banner of the order, floating from the ramparts, proclaimed that St. Elmo was still in the hands of the Christians! It was the last triumph of the garrison.²⁵

They were indeed reduced to extremity; with their ammunition nearly exhausted; their weapons battered and broken; their fortifications yawning with breaches, like some tempest-tossed vessel with its seams opening in every direction, and ready to founder; the few survivors covered with wounds; and many of them so far crippled as to be scarcely able to drag their enfeebled body along the ramparts. One more attack, and the scene would be closed.

In this deplorable state, they determined to make an effort to communicate with their friends on the other side of the harbor, and report to them their condition. The distance was not great; and among the Maltese were many excellent swimmers, who,

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 216, 217.—Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 54.—Calderon, Gloriosa Defensa de

Malta, p. 80. et seq.—Cabrera, Filipe Segundo, lib. vi. cap. 25.

trained from childhood to the sea, took to it as to their native element. One of these offered to bear a message to the grand-master. Diving and swimming long under water, he was fortunate enough to escape the enemy's bullets, and landed safe on the opposite shore.

La Valette was deeply affected by his story, though not surprised by it. With the rest of the knights, he had watched with straining eyes the course of the fight; and though marvelling that, in spite of odds so great, victory should have remained with the Christians, he knew how dearly they must have bought it. Though with little confidence in his success, he resolved to answer their appeal by making one effort to aid them. Five large barges were instantly launched, and furnished with a reinforcement of troops and supplies for the garrison. The knights thronged to the quay, each eagerly contending for the perilous right to embark in them. They thought only of their comrades in St. Elmo.

It turned out as La Valette had foreseen. The landing-place was commanded by a battery of heavy guns, and by hundreds of musketeers, menacing instant death to whoever should approach the shore. But the knights were not allowed to approach it; for the Turkish admiral, lying off the entrance of the Great Port, and aware of the preparations that were making, sent a flotilla of his lighter vessels into the harbor, to intercept the convoy. And so prompt were their movements, that unless the Christians had put back again with all speed, they would have been at once surrounded and captured by the enemy.

The defenders of St. Elmo, who had watched from the ramparts the boats coming to their assistance, saw the failure of the attempt; and the last ray of hope faded away in their bosoms. Their doom was sealed. Little more was left, but calmly to await the stroke of the executioner. Yet they did not abandon themselves to an unmanly despair; but, with heroic constancy, they prepared to die like martyrs for the good cause to which they had consecrated their lives.

That night was passed, not in vain efforts to repair the defences, with the hope of protracting existence some few hours longer, but in the solemn preparation of men who felt themselves standing on the brink of eternity. They prayed, confessed, received the sacrament, and, exhorting one another to do their duty, again renewed their vows, which bound them to lay down their lives, if necessary, in defence of the Faith. Some, among whom Miranda and the bailiff of Negropont were especially noticed, went about encouraging and consoling their brethren, and, though covered with wounds themselves, administering such comfort as they could to the sick and the dying;—and the dying lay thick around, mingled with the dead, on the ruins which were soon to become their common sepulchre.²⁶

Thus passed away the dreary night; when, tenderly embracing one another, like friends who part

²⁶ "Ellos como aquellos q̃ la mañana havia de ser su postrer dia en este mūdo, unos con otros se confessavan, y rogavan a nuestro señor que por su infinita misericordia, la tuviesse de sus animas, pues

le costaron su preciosissima sangre para redemirlas." Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 54.

See also Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. ii. pp. 217, 218.;—Cabre-ra, Filipe Segundo, lib. vi. cap. 25.

for ever, each good knight repaired to his post, prepared to sell his life as dearly as he could. Some of the more aged and infirm, and those crippled by their wounds, were borne in the arms of their comrades to the spot, where, seated on the ruins, and wielding their ineffectual swords, they prepared, like true and loyal knights, to die upon the breach.

They did not wait long. The Turks, so often balked of their prey, called loudly to be led to the assault. Their advance was not checked by the feeble volleys thrown at random against them from the fortress; and they were soon climbing the ascent of the breach, still slippery with the carnage of the preceding day. But with all their numbers, it was long before they could break the little line of Maltese chivalry which was there to receive them. Incredible as it may seem, the struggle lasted for some hours longer, while the fate of St. Elmo hung suspended in the balance. At length, after a short respite, the Turkish host rallied for a last assault; and the tide of battle, pouring through the ample breach with irresistible fury, bore down cavalier and soldier, leaving no living thing upon the ramparts. A small party of the knights, escaping in the tumult, threw themselves into the chapel; but, finding that no quarter was given to those who surrendered, they rushed out, and perished on the swords of the enemy. A body of nine cavaliers, posted near the end of the fosse, not far from the ground occupied by Dragut's men, surrendered themselves as prisoners of war to the corsairs; and the latter, who, in their piratical trade, had learned to regard men as a kind of mer-

chandise, happily refused to deliver up the Christians to the Turks, holding them for ransom. These were the only members of the order who survived the massacre.²⁷ A few Maltese soldiers, however, experienced swimmers, succeeded, amidst the tumult, in reaching the opposite side of the harbor, where they spread the sad tidings of the loss of St. Elmo. This was speedily confirmed by the volleys of the Turkish ordnance; and the standard of the Crescent, planted on the spot so lately occupied by the banner of St. John, showed too plainly that this strong post, the key of the island, had passed from the Christians into the hands of the infidel.²⁸

The Ottoman fleet, soon afterward, doubling the point, entered Port Musiette, on the west, with music playing, and gay with pennons and streamers; while the rocks rang with the shouts of the Turkish soldiery, and the batteries on shore replied in thunders to the artillery of the shipping.

The day on which this occurred, the twenty-third of June, was that of the festival of St. John the Bap-

²⁷ Vertot, whose appetite for the marvellous sometimes carries him into the miraculous, gives us to understand that not one of the garrison survived the storming of St. Elmo. (Knights of Malta, vol. ii. p. 219.) If that were so, one would like to know how the historian got his knowledge of what was doing in the fortress, the day and night previous to the assault. The details quoted above from Balbi account for this knowledge, and carry with them an air of probability. (Verdadera Relacion, fol. 55.)

²⁸ "Luego que entraron los Tur-

cos en sant Ermo, abatieron el estädarte de san Juan, y en su lugar plantaron una vanderá del gran Turco, y en todo aquel dia no hizieron otra cosa, que plantar vâderas, y vanderillas por la muralla, segun su costumbre." Ibid., fol. 55.

See also, for the storming of St. Elmo, Calderon, *Gloriosa Defensa de Malta*, pp. 81-84.; Miniana, *Hist. de España*, p. 351.; Cabrera, *Filipe Segundo*, lib. vi. cap. 25.; Campana, *Filippo Secondo*, par. ii. p. 159.; Sagredo, *Monarcas Othomanos*, p. 245.; Vertot, *Knights of Malta*, vol. ii. p. 219. et seq.

tist, the patron of the order. It had been always celebrated by the knights with greater splendor than any other anniversary. Now, alas! it was to them a day of humiliation and mourning, while they had the additional mortification to see it observed as a day of triumphant jubilee by the enemies of the Faith.²⁹

To add to their distress, Mustapha sullied his victory by some brutal acts, which seem to have been in keeping with his character. The heads of four of the principal knights, among them those of Miranda and the bailiff of Negropont, were set high on poles looking towards the town. A spectacle yet more shocking was presented to the eyes of the besieged. The Turkish general caused the bodies of several cavaliers — some of them, it is said, while life was still palpitating within them — to be scored on the bosoms with gashes in the form of a cross. Thus defaced, they were lashed to planks, and thrown into the water. Several of them drifted to the opposite shore, where they were easily recognized by their brethren; and La Valette, as he gazed on the dishonored remains of his dear companions, was melted to tears. But grief soon yielded to feelings of a sterner nature. He commanded the heads of his Turkish prisoners to be struck off, and shot from the large guns into the enemy's lines, — by way of teaching the Moslems, as the chronicler tells us, a lesson of humanity!³⁰

The number of Christians who fell in this siege amounted to about fifteen hundred. Of these one

²⁹ "A todos nos pesava en el anima porque aquellas eran fiestas que solian hazer los cavalleros en tal dia, para honor deste su santo

avogado." Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 55.

³⁰ Ibid., fol. 58. — Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. ii. p. 220.

hundred and twenty-three were members of the order, and among them several of its most illustrious warriors.³¹ The Turkish loss is estimated at eight thousand, at the head of whom stood Dragut, of more account than a legion of the common file. He was still living, though speechless, when the fort was stormed. He was roused from his lethargy by the shouts of victory, and when, upon turning with inquiring looks to those around, he was told the cause, he raised his eyes to Heaven, as if in gratitude for the event, and expired.³²

The Turkish commander, dismantling St. Elmo, — which, indeed, was little better than a heap of ruins, — sent some thirty cannon, that had lined the works, as the trophies of victory, to Constantinople.³³

Thus ended the memorable siege of St. Elmo, in which a handful of warriors withstood, for the space of a month, the whole strength of the Turkish army. Such a result, while it proves the unconquerable valor of the garrison, intimates that the Turks, however efficient they may have been in field operations, had little skill as engineers, and no acquaintance with the true principles of conducting a siege. It must have been obvious, from the first, that, to bring the siege to a speedy issue, it was necessary to destroy the

³¹ Balbi has given a catalogue of the knights who fell in the siege, with the names of the countries to which they respectively belonged. Verdadera Relacion, fol. 56.

³² Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. ii. p. 219.

No name of the sixteenth century appears more frequently in the ballad poetry of Spain than that of Dragut. The "*Romancers General*"

contains many *romances*, some of them of great beauty, reciting the lament of the poor captive chained to the galley of the dread rover, or celebrating his naval encounters with the chivalry of Malta, — "*las velas de la religion*," as the squadrons of the order were called.

³³ Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 33.

communications of St. Elmo with the town. Yet this was not attempted till the arrival of Dragut, who early recommended the construction of a battery for this purpose on some high land on the opposite side of the Great Port. In this he was overruled by the Turkish commander. It was not till some time later that the line of investment, at the corsair's suggestion, was continued to the water's edge,—and the fate of the fortress was decided.

St. Elmo fell. But precious time had been lost,—an irreparable loss, as it proved, to the besiegers; while the place had maintained so long and gallant a resistance as greatly to encourage the Christians, and in some degree to diminish the confidence of the Moslems. “What will not the parent cost,” exclaimed Mustapha,—alluding to St. Angelo,—“when the child has cost us so dear!”³⁴

³⁴ The two principal authorities on whom I have relied for the siege of Malta are Balbi and Vertot. The former was a soldier, who served through the siege, his account of which, now not easily met with, was printed shortly afterwards, and in less than three years went into a second edition,—being that used in the present work. As Balbi was both an eyewitness and an actor, on a theatre so limited that nothing could be well hidden from view, and as he wrote while events were fresh in his memory, his testimony is of the highest value. It loses nothing by the temperate, homebred style in which the book is written, like that of a man anxious only to tell the truth, and not to magnify the cause or the party to which he is attached. In this the honest soldier forms a contrast to his more accomplished rival, the Abbé de Vertot.

This eminent writer was invited

to compose the history of the order, and its archives were placed by the knights at his disposal for this purpose. He accepted the task; and in performing it he has sounded the note of panegyric with as hearty a good will as if he had been a knight hospitaller himself. This somewhat detracts from the value of a work which must be admitted to rest, in respect to materials, on the soundest historical basis. The abbé's turn for the romantic has probably aided, instead of hurting him, with the generality of readers. His clear and sometimes eloquent style, the interest of his story, and the dramatic skill with which he brings before the eye the peculiar traits of his actors, redeem, to some extent, the prolixity of his narrative, and have combined, not merely to commend the book to popular favor, but to make it the standard work on the subject.

CHAPTER IV.

SIEGE OF MALTA.

Il Borgo invested.—Storming of St. Michael.—Slaughter of the Turks.
—Incessant Cannonade.—General Assault.—The Turks repulsed.—
Perilous Condition of Il Borgo.—Constancy of La Valette.

1565.

THE strength of the order was now concentrated on the two narrow slips of land which run out from the eastern side of the Great Port. Although some account of these places has been given to the reader, it will not be amiss to refresh his recollection of what is henceforth to be the scene of operations.

The northern peninsula, occupied by the town of Il Borgo, and at the extreme point by the castle of St. Angelo, was defended by works stronger and in better condition than the fortifications of St. Elmo. The care of them was divided among the different *languages*, each of which gave its own name to the bastion it defended. Thus the Spanish knights were intrusted with the bastion of Castile, on the eastern corner of the peninsula, — destined to make an important figure in the ensuing siege.

The parallel slip of land was crowned by the fort

of St. Michael,—a work of narrower dimensions than the castle of St. Angelo,—at the base of which might be seen a small gathering of houses, hardly deserving the name of a town. This peninsula was surrounded by fortifications scarcely yet completed, on which the grand-master La Sangle, who gave his name to the place, had generously expended his private fortune. The works were terminated, on the extreme point, by a low bastion, or rather demi-bastion, called the Spur.

The precious interval gained by the long detention of the Turks before St. Elmo had been diligently employed by La Valette in putting the defences of both La Sangle and Il Borgo in the best condition possible under the circumstances. In this good work all united, — men, women, and children. All were animated by the same patriotic feeling, and by a common hatred of the infidel. La Valette ordered the heavy guns to be taken from the galleys which were lying at anchor, and placed on the walls of the fortresses. He directed that such provisions as were in the hands of individuals should be delivered up for a fair compensation, and transferred to the public magazines.¹ Five companies of soldiers, stationed in the Notable City, in the interior of the island, he now ordered to Il Borgo, where their services would be more needed. Finally, as there were no accommodations for prisoners, who, indeed, could not be maintained without encroaching on the supplies necessary for the garrison,

¹ By another ordinance, La Valette caused all the dogs in La Sangle and Il Borgo to be killed, because they disturbed the garri-

sons by night, and ate their provisions by day. Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 29.

La Valette commanded that no prisoners should be made, but that all who fell into the hands of the victors should be put to the sword.² It was to be on both sides a war of extermination.

At this juncture, La Valette had the satisfaction of receiving a reinforcement from Sicily, which, though not large, was of great importance in the present state of affairs. The viceroy had, at length, so far yielded to the importunities of the Knights of St. John who were then at his court, impatiently waiting for the means of joining their brethren, as to fit out a squadron of four galleys, — two of his own, and two belonging to the order. They had forty knights on board, and seven hundred soldiers, excellent troops, drawn chiefly from the Spanish garrisons in Italy. The vessels were placed under command of Don Juan de Cardona, who was instructed to return without attempting to land, should he find St. Elmo in the hands of the enemy. Cardona, who seems to have had a good share of the timid, vacillating policy of his superior, fearful of the Ottoman fleet, stood off and on for some days, without approaching the island. During this time St. Elmo was taken. Cardona, ignorant of the fact, steered towards the south, and finally anchored off Pietra Negra, on the opposite side of the island. Here one of the knights was permitted to go on shore to collect information. He there learned the fate of St. Elmo; but, as he carefully concealed the tidings, the rest of the forces were speedily landed, and Cardona, with his galleys, was soon on the way to Sicily.

² Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. iii. p. 2.

The detachment was under the command of the Chevalier de Robles, a brave soldier, and one of the most illustrious men of the order. Under cover of night, he passed within gunshot of the Turkish lines without being discovered, and was so fortunate as to bring his men in safety to the side of the English harbor opposite to Il Borgo, which it washes on the north. There he found boats awaiting his arrival. They had been provided by the grand-master, who was advised of his movements. A thick fog lay upon the waters; and under its friendly mantle Robles and his troops crossed over in safety to the town, where they were welcomed by the knights, who joyfully greeted the brave companions that had come to share with them the perils of the siege.³

While this was going on, Mustapha, the Turkish commander, had been revolving in his mind, whether it were not possible to gain his ends by negotiation instead of war, and thus be spared the waste of life which the capture of St. Elmo had cost him. He flattered himself that La Valette, taking warning by the fate of that fortress, might be brought to capitulate on fair and honorable terms. He accordingly sent a messenger with a summons to the grand-master to deliver up the island, on the assurance of a free passage for himself and his followers, with all their effects, to Sicily.

The envoy chosen was a Greek slave,—an old man, who had lived from boyhood in captivity. Under

³ Ibid., p. 4.—Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 64.—Calderon, Gloriosa Defensa de Malta, p. 94.—Sagredo, Monarcas Othomanos, p. 296.

protection of a flag of truce, the slave gained admission into St. Angelo, and was conducted blindfold to the presence of the grand-master. He there delivered his message. La Valette calmly listened, but without deigning to reply; and when the speaker had ended, the stern chief ordered him to be taken from his presence, and instantly hanged. The wretched man threw himself at the feet of the grand-master, beseeching him to spare his life, and protesting that he was but a poor slave, and had come, against his will, in obedience to the commands of the Turkish general. La Valette, who had probably no intention from the first to have his order carried into execution, affected to relent, declaring, however, that, should any other messenger venture hereafter to insult him with the like proposals, he should not escape so easily. The terrified old man was then dismissed. As he left the presence, he was led through long files of the soldiery drawn up in imposing array, and was shown the strong works of the castle of St. Angelo. "Look," said one of the officers, pointing to the deep ditch which surrounded the fortress, "there is all the room we can afford your master; but it is deep enough to bury him and his followers!" The slave, though a Christian, could not be persuaded to remain and take his chance with the besieged. They must be beaten in the end, he said, and, when retaken by the Turks, his case would be worse than ever.⁴

There was now no alternative for Mustapha but to

⁴ Calderon, *Gloriosa Defensa de Malta*, p. 91.—Vertot, *Knights of Malta*, vol. iii. p. 3.—De Thou, *Histoire Universelle*, tom. v. p. 67.

—Cabrera, *Filipe Segundo*, lib. vi. cap. 26.—Sagredo, *Monarcas Otomanos*, p. 246.

fight; and he had not lost a moment since the fall of St. Elmo in pushing forward his preparations. Trenches had been opened on the heights at the foot of Mount Coradin, at the southern extremity of the Great Port, and continued on a line that stretched to Mount St. Salvador. Where the soil was too hard to be readily turned up, the defences were continued by a wall of stone. Along the heights, on different points of the line, batteries were established, and mounted with guns of the heaviest calibre. Batteries were also raised on the high ground which, under the name of Mount Sceberras, divides Port Musiette from the Great Port, terminating in the point of land crowned by St. Elmo. A few cannon were even planted by the Turks on the ruins of this castle.

Thus the Christian fortresses were menaced on every point; and while the lines of the besiegers cut off all communication on the land side, a detachment of the fleet, blocking up the entrance to the Great Port, effectually cut off intercourse by sea. The investment by land and by sea was complete.

Early in July the wide circle of batteries, mounting between sixty and seventy pieces of artillery, opened their converging fire on the fortresses, the towns, and the shipping, which lay at anchor in the Port of Galleys. The cannonade was returned with spirit by the guns of St. Angelo and St. Michael, well served by men acquainted with their duty. So soon as the breaches were practicable, Mustapha proposed to begin by storming St. Michael, the weaker of the two fortresses; and he determined to make the assault by sea as well as by land. It would not be possible,

however, to bring round his vessels lying in Port Musiette into the Great Port, without exposing them to the guns of St. Angelo. He resorted, therefore, to an expedient startling enough, but not new in the annals of warfare. He caused a large number of boats to be dragged across the high land which divides the two harbors. This toilsome work was performed by his Christian slaves; and the garrison beheld with astonishment the Turkish flotilla descending the rugged slopes of the opposite eminence, and finally launched on the waters of the inland basin. No less than eighty boats, some of them of the largest size, were thus transported across the heights.

Having completed this great work, Mustapha made his preparations for the assault. At this time, he was joined by a considerable reinforcement under Hassem, the Algerine corsair, who commanded at the memorable sieges of Oran and Mazarquivir. Struck with the small size of the castle of St. Elmo, Hassem intimated his surprise that it should have held out so long against the Turkish arms; and he besought Mustapha to entrust him with the conduct of the assault that was to be made on Fort St. Michael. The Turkish general, not unwilling that the presumptuous young chief should himself prove the temper of the Maltese swords, readily gave him the command, and the day was fixed for the attack.

Fortunately, at this time, a deserter, a man of some consequence in the Turkish army, crossed over to Il Borgo, and acquainted the grand-master with the designs of the enemy. La Sangle was defended on the north, as already noticed, by a strong iron chain,

which, stretching across the Port of Galleys at its mouth, would prevent the approach of boats in that direction. La Valette now caused a row of palisades to be sunk in the mud, at the bottom of the harbour, in a line extending from the extreme point of La Sangle to the foot of Mount Coradin. These were bound together by heavy chains, so well secured as to oppose an effectual barrier to the passage of the Turkish flotilla. The length of this barricade was not great. But it was a work of much difficulty, — not the less so that it was necessary to perform it in the night, in order to secure the workmen from the enemy's guns. In little more than a week, it was accomplished. Mustapha sent a small body of men, excellent swimmers, armed with axes, to force an opening in the barrier. They had done some mischief to the work, when a party of Maltese, swimming out, with their swords between their teeth, fell on the Turks, beat them off, and succeeded in restoring the palisades.⁵

Early in the morning, on the fifteenth of July, two cannon in the Ottoman lines, from opposite sides of the Great Port, gave the signal for the assault. Hassem prepared to lead it, in person, on the land side. The attack by water he intrusted to an Algerine corsair, his lieutenant. Before the report of the cannon had died away, a great number of boats were seen by the garrison of St. Michael putting off from the shore. They were filled with troops, and among

⁵ Balbi, *Verdadera Relacion*, fol. 61, 62. 68. — Calderon, *Gloriosa Defensa de Malta*, pp. 95-100. — Vertot, *Knights of Malta*, vol. iii.

pp. 4-7. — Cabrera, *Filipe Segundo*, lib. vi. cap. 26. — Herrera, *Historia General*, lib. xii. cap. 7.

these, to judge from their dress, were many persons of condition. The account is given by the old soldier so often quoted, who, stationed on the bastion of the Spur, had a full view of the enemy. It was a gay spectacle, these Moslem chiefs, in their rich Oriental costumes, with their gaudy-colored turbans, and their loose, flowing mantles of crimson, or of cloth of gold and silver; the beams of the rising sun glancing on their polished weapons,—their bows of delicate workmanship, their scymitars from the forges of Alexandria and Damascus, their muskets of Fez.⁶ “It was a beautiful sight to see,” adds the chronicler with some *naiiveté*, “if one could have looked on it without danger to himself.”⁷

In advance of the squadron came two or three boats, bearing persons whose venerable aspect and dark-colored robes proclaimed them to be the religious men of the Moslems. They seemed to be reciting from a volume before them, and muttering what might be prayers to Allah,—possibly invoking his vengeance on the infidel. But these soon dropped astern, leaving the way open for the rest of the flotilla, which steered for the palisades, with the intention evidently of forcing a passage. But the barrier proved too strong for their efforts; and, chafed by the musketry which now opened on them from the bastion, the Algerine commander threw himself into

⁶ “No avia hombre que no truxesse aljuba, el que menos de grana, muchos de tela de oro, y de plata, y damasco carmesi, y muy buenas escopetas de fez, cimitaras de Alexandria, y de Damasco, arcos muy finos, y muy ricos turban-

tes.” Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 70.

⁷ “Cargadas de gente muy luzida, vista por cierto muy linda, sino fuera tan peligrosa.” Ibid., ubi supra.

the water, which was somewhat above his girdle, and, followed by his men, advanced boldly towards the shore.

Two mortars were mounted on the rampart. But, through some mismanagement, they were not worked; and the assailants were allowed to reach the foot of the bastion, which they prepared to carry by escalade. Applying their ladders, they speedily began to mount; when they were assailed by showers of stones, hand-grenades, and combustibles of various kinds; while huge fragments of rock were rolled over the parapet, crushing men and ladders, and scattering them in ruin below. The ramparts were covered with knights and soldiers, among whom the stately form of Antonio de Zanguerra, the commander of the post, was conspicuous, towering above his comrades, and cheering them on to the fight. Meantime the assailants, mustering like a swarm of hornets to the attack, were soon replacing the broken ladders, and again clambering up the walls. The leading files were pushed upward by those below; yet scarcely had the bold adventurers risen above the parapet, when they were pierced by the pikes of the soldiers, or struck down by the swords and battle-axes of the knights. At this crisis, a spark unfortunately falling into the magazine of combustibles, it took fire, and blew up with a terrific explosion, killing or maiming numbers of the garrison, and rolling volumes of blinding smoke along the bastion. The besiegers profited by the confusion to gain a footing on the ramparts; and, when the clouds of vapor began to dissipate, the garrison were astonished to find their enemies at their side, and a

number of small banners, such as the Turks usually bore into the fight, planted on the walls. The contest now raged fiercer than ever, as the parties fought on more equal terms;—the Mussulmans smarting under their wounds, and the Christians fired with the recollection of St. Elmo, and the desire of avenging their slaughtered brethren. The struggle continued long after the sun, rising high in the heavens, poured down a flood of heat on the combatants; and the garrison, pressed by superior numbers, weary and faint with wounds, were hardly able to keep their footing on the slippery ground, saturated with their own blood and that of their enemies. Still the cheering battle-cry of St. John rose in the air; and their brave leader, Zanoguerra, at the head of his knights, was to be seen in the thickest of the fight. There too was Brother Robert, an ecclesiastic of the order, with a sword in one hand and a crucifix in the other, though wounded himself, rushing among the ranks, and exhorting the men “to fight for the faith of Jesus Christ, and to die in its defence.”⁸

At this crisis the commander, Zanoguerra, though clad in armor of proof, was hit by a random musket-shot, which stretched him lifeless on the rampart. At his fall the besiegers set up a shout of triumph, and redoubled their efforts. It would now have gone hard with the garrison, had it not been for a timely reinforcement which arrived from Il Borgo. It was sent by La Valette, who had learned the perilous state

⁸ “Nuestro predicador fray Ruberto, el qual en todo el assalto yva por todas las postas con un crucifixo en la una mano, y la es-

pada en la otra: animandonos a bien morir, y pelear por la fe de Iesu Christo: y fue herido este dia su paternidad.” Ibid., fol. 73.

of the bastion. He had, not long before this, caused a floating bridge to be laid across the Port of Galleys, —thus connecting the two peninsulas with each other, and affording a much readier means of communication than before existed.

While this was going on, a powerful reinforcement was on its way to the support of the assailants. Ten boats of the largest size, having a thousand janizaries on board, were seen advancing across the Great Harbor from the opposite shore. Taking warning by the fate of their countrymen, they avoided the palisades, and, pursuing a more northerly course, stood for the extreme point of the Spur. By so doing, they exposed themselves to the fire of a battery in St. Angelo, sunk down almost to the water's level. It was this depressed condition of the work that secured it from the notice of the Turks. The battery, mounted with five guns, was commanded by the Chevalier de Guiral, who coolly waited until the enemy had come within range of his shot, when he gave the word to fire. The pieces were loaded with heavy balls, and with bags filled with chain and bits of iron. The effect of the discharge was terrible. Nine of the barges were shattered to pieces, and immediately sunk.⁹ The water was covered with the splinters of the vessels, with mutilated trunks, dissevered limbs, fragments of clothes, and quantities of provisions; for the enemy came prepared to take up their quarters permanently in the fortress. Amidst the dismal wreck a few wretches were to be seen, struggling

⁹ "Echo nueve barcas delas mayores a fondo que no se salvo ninguno, y auria en estas barcas ochocientos Turcos." Ibid., fol. 72.

with the waves, and calling on their comrades for help. But those in the surviving boat, when they had recovered from the shock of the explosion, had no mind to remain longer in so perilous a position, but made the best of their way back to the shore, leaving their companions to their fate. Day after day the waves threw upon the strand the corpses of the drowned men; and the Maltese divers long continued to drag up from the bottom rich articles of wearing-apparel, ornaments, and even purses of money, which had been upon the persons of the janizaries. Eight hundred are said to have perished by this disaster, which may, not improbably, have decided the fate of the fortress; for the strength of the reinforcement would have been more than a match for that sent by La Valette to the support of the garrison.¹⁰

Meanwhile the succors detached by the grand-master had no sooner entered the bastion, than, seeing their brethren so hard beset, and the Moslem flags planted along the parapet, they cried their war-cry, and fell furiously on the enemy. In this they were well supported by the garrison, who gathered strength at the sight of the reinforcement. The Turks, now pressed on all sides, gave way. Some succeeded in making their escape by the ladders, as they had entered. Others were hurled down on the rocks below. Most, turning on their assailants, fell fighting on the rampart which they had so nearly

¹⁰ This seems to have been Balbi's opinion. — "En conclusion, la casa mata del comendador Guiral fue este dia a juyzio de todos la

salvacion de la Isla, porque si las barcas ya dichas echavan su gête en tierra, no les pudieramos resistir en ninguna manera." Ibid., fol. 73.

won. Those who escaped hurried to the shore, hoping to gain the boats, which lay off at some distance; when a detachment, sallying from the bastion, intercepted their flight. Thus at bay, they had no alternative but to fight. But their spirit was gone; and they were easily hewed down by their pursuers. Some, throwing themselves on their knees, piteously begged for mercy. "Such mercy," shouted the victors, "as you showed at St. Elmo!"¹¹ and buried their daggers in their bodies.

While this bloody work was going on below, the knights and soldiers, gathered on the exposed points of the bastion above, presented an obvious mark to the Turkish guns across the water, which had not been worked during the assault, for fear of injuring the assailants. Now that the Turks had vanished from the ramparts, some heavy shot were thrown among the Christians, with fatal effect. Among others who were slain was Frederic de Toledo, a son of the viceroy of Sicily. He was a young knight of great promise, and was under the especial care of the grand-master, who kept him constantly near his person. But when the generous youth learned the extremity to which his brethren in La Sangle were reduced, he secretly joined the reinforcement which was going to their relief, and did his duty like a good knight in the combat which followed. While on the rampart, he was struck down by a cannon-shot; and a splinter from his cuirass mortally wounded a comrade to whom he was speaking at the time.

While the fight was thus going on at the Spur;

¹¹ Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. iii. p. 13.

Hassem was storming the breach of Fort St. Michael, on the opposite quarter. The storming-party, consisting of both Moors and Turks, rushed to the assault with their usual intrepidity. But they found a very different enemy from the spectral forms which, wasted by toil and suffering, had opposed so ineffectual a resistance in the last days of St. Elmo. In vain did the rushing tide of assailants endeavor to force an opening through the stern array of warriors, which, like a wall of iron, now filled up the breach. Recoiling in confusion, the leading files fell back upon the rear, and all was disorder. But Hassem soon re-formed his ranks, and again led them to the charge. Again they were repulsed with loss; but as fresh troops came to their aid, the little garrison must have been borne down by numbers, had not their comrades, flushed with their recent victory at the bastion, hurried to their support, and, sweeping like a whirlwind through the breach, driven the enemy with dreadful carnage along the slope, and compelled him to take refuge in his trenches.

Thus ended the first assault of the besiegers since the fall of St. Elmo. The success of the Christians was complete. Between three and four thousand Mussulmans, including those who were drowned,—according to the Maltese statements,—fell in the two attacks on the fortress and the bastion. But the arithmetic of an enemy is not apt to be exact.¹² The

¹² Compare Vertot, *Knights of Malta*, vol. iii. p. 13., and Balbi, *Verdadera Relacion*, fol. 73.—The latter chronicler, for a wonder,

raises the sum total of the killed to a somewhat higher figure than the abbé,—calling it full four thousand.

loss of the Christians did not exceed two hundred. Even this was a heavy loss to the besieged, and included some of their best knights, to say nothing of others disabled by their wounds. Still it was a signal victory; and its influence was felt in raising the spirits of the besieged, and in inspiring them with confidence. La Valette was careful to cherish these feelings. The knights, followed by the whole population of Il Borgo, went in solemn procession to the great church of St. Lawrence, where *Te Deum* was chanted, while the colors taken from the infidel were suspended from the walls as glorious trophies of the victory.¹³

Mustapha now found that the spirit of the besieged, far from being broken by their late reverses, was higher than ever, as their resources were greater, and their fortifications stronger, than those of St. Elmo. He saw the necessity of proceeding with greater caution. He resolved to level the defences of the Christians with the ground, and then, combining the whole strength of his forces, make simultaneous assaults on Il Borgo and St. Michael. His first step was to continue his line of intrenchments below St. Salvador to the water's edge, and thus cut off the enemy's communication with the opposite side of the English Port, by means of which the late reinforcement from Sicily had reached him. He further strengthened the battery on St. Salvador, arming it

¹³ The particulars of the assaults on St. Michael and the Spur are given by Balbi, *Verdadera Relacion*, fol. 61-74.; and with more or less inaccuracy by Vertot, *Knights of Malta*, vol. iii. pp. 8-13.; Calderon, *Gloriosa Defensa de Malta*, pp. 110-116.; De Thou,

Historie Universelle, tom. v. pp. 72-74.; Cabrera, *Filipe Segundo*, lib. v. cap. 26.; Herrera, *Historia General*, lib. xii. cap. 7.; Sagredo, *Monarcas Othomanos*, p. 246.; Campana, *Vita di Filippo Secondo*, tom. ii. p. 160.

with sixteen guns,—two of them of such enormous calibre, as to throw stone bullets of three hundred pounds' weight.

From this ponderous battery he now opened a crushing fire on the neighboring bastion of Castile, and on the quarter of Il Borgo lying nearest to it. The storm of marble and metal that fell upon the houses, though these were built of stone, soon laid many of them in ruins; and the shot, sweeping the streets, killed numbers of the inhabitants, including women and children. La Valette caused barriers of solid masonry to be raised across the streets for the protection of the citizens. As this was a work of great danger, he put his slaves upon it, trusting, too, that the enemy might be induced to mitigate his fire from tenderness for the lives of his Moslem brethren. But in such an expectation he greatly erred. More than five hundred slaves fell under the incessant volleys of the besiegers; and it was only by the most severe, indeed cruel treatment, that these unfortunate beings could be made to resume their labors.¹⁴

La Valette, at this time, in order to protect the town against assault on the side of the English Port, caused a number of vessels laden with heavy stones to be sunk not far from shore. They were further secured by anchors bound to one another with chains,

¹⁴ Cruel indeed, according to the report of Balbi, who tells us that the Christians cut off the ears of the more refractory, and even put some of them to death,—*pour encourager les autres*.—"Han muerto en esta jornada al trabajo mas de

quinientos esclavos; mas los pobres llegaron atal de puros cansados y acabados del trabajo continuo, que no podian estar en pie, y se dexavan cortar las orejas y matar, por no poder trabajar mas." Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 66.

forming altogether an impenetrable barrier against any approach by water.

The inhabitants of Il Borgo, as well as the soldiers, were now active in preparations for defence. Some untwisted large ropes and cables to get materials for making bags to serve as gabions. Some were busy with manufacturing different sorts of fireworks, much relied on as a means of defence by the besieged. Others were employed in breaking up the large stones from the ruined buildings into smaller ones, which proved efficient missiles when hurled on the heads of the assailants below. But the greatest and most incessant labor was that of repairing the breaches, or of constructing retrenchments to defend them. The sound of the hammer and the saw was everywhere to be heard. The fires of the forges were never suffered to go out. The hum of labor was as unintermitting throughout the city as in the season of peace; — but with a very different end.¹⁵

Over all these labors the grand-master exercised a careful superintendence. He was always on the spot where his presence was needed. His eye seemed never to slumber. He performed many of the duties of a soldier, as well as of a commander. He made the rounds constantly in the night, to see that all was well, and that the sentinels were at their posts. On these occasions he freely exposed himself to danger, showing a carelessness of his own safety that called forth more than once the remonstrances of his brethren. He was indeed watchful over all, says the old chronicler who witnessed it; showing no sign of apprehen-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 67. 77.—Vertot, *Compana, Vita di Filippo Secondo*, Knights of Malta, vol. iii. p. 18.— tom. ii. p. 160.

sion in his valiant countenance, but by his noble presence giving heart and animation to his followers.¹⁶

Yet the stoutest heart which witnessed the scene might well have thrilled with apprehension. Far as the eye could reach, the lines of the Moslem army stretched over hill and valley; while a deafening roar of artillery from fourteen batteries shook the solid earth, and, borne across the waters for more than a hundred miles, sounded to the inhabitants of Syracuse and Catania like the mutterings of distant thunder.¹⁷ In the midst of this turmoil, and encompassed by the glittering lines of the besiegers, the two Christian fortresses might be dimly discerned amidst volumes of fire and smoke, which, rolling darkly round their summits, almost hid from view the banner of St. John, proudly waving in the breeze, as in defiance of the enemy.

But the situation of the garrison, as the works crumbled under the stroke of the bullet, became every day more critical. La Valette contrived to send information of it to the viceroy of Sicily, urging him to delay his coming no longer, if he would save the island. But, strange to say, such was the timid policy that had crept into the viceroy's councils, that it was seriously discussed whether it was expedient to send aid at all to the Knights of Malta! Some

¹⁶ "En fin era in todo diligente, vigilante y animoso, y jamas se conosco en su valeroso semblante ninguna señal de temor, antes con su presencia dava esfuerço y animo à sus cavalleros y soldados." Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 77.

¹⁷ "Luego que todas estas baterias començaron de batir, y todas

en un tiempo, era tanto el ruydo y temblor que parecia quererse acabar el mudo, y puedese bien creer que el ruydo fuesse tal, pues se sentia muy claramente dende Caragoça, y dende Catania, que ay ciento y veynte millas de Malta a estas dos ciudades." Ibid., fol. 78.

insisted that there was no obligation on Spain to take any part in the quarrel, and that the knights should be left to fight out the battle with the Turks in Malta, as they had before done in Rhodes. Others remonstrated against this, declaring it would be an eternal blot on the scutcheon of Castile, if she should desert in their need the brave chivalry who for so many years had been fighting the battles of Christendom. The king of Spain, in particular, as the feudatory sovereign of the order, was bound to protect the island from the Turks, who, moreover, once in possession of it, would prove the most terrible scourge that ever fell on the commerce of the Mediterranean. The more generous, happily the more politic, counsel prevailed; and the viceroy contrived to convey an assurance to the grand-master, that, if he could hold out till the end of the following month, he would come with sixteen thousand men to his relief.¹⁸

But this was a long period for men in extremity to wait. La Valette saw with grief how much deceived he had been in thus leaning on the viceroy. He determined to disappoint his brethren no longer by holding out delusive promises of succor. "The only succor to be relied on," he said, "was that of Almighty God. He who has hitherto preserved his children from danger will not now abandon them."¹⁹ La Valette reminded his followers, that they were the soldiers of Heaven, fighting for the Faith, for liberty

¹⁸ Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. iii. pp. 21, 22.

¹⁹ "Dixo publicamente, que el no aguardava socorro ya sino era del omnipotente Dios el qual era el socorro verdadero, y el que hasta

entonces nos havia librado, y que ni mas ni menos nos libraria por el avenir, delas manos delos enemigos de su santa fee." Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 81.

and life. "Should the enemy prevail," he added, with a politic suggestion, "the Christians could expect no better fate than that of their comrades in St. Elmo." The grand-master's admonition was not lost upon the soldiers. "Every man of us," says Balbi, "resolved to die rather than surrender, and to sell his life as dearly as possible. From that hour no man talked of succors."²⁰

One of those spiritual weapons from the papal armory, which have sometimes proved of singular efficacy in times of need, came now most seasonably to the aid of La Valette. A bull of Pius the Fourth granted plenary indulgence for all sins which had been committed by those engaged in this holy war against the Moslems. "There were few," says the chronicler, "either women or men, old enough to appreciate it, who did not strive to merit this grace by most earnest devotion to the cause, and who did not have entire faith that all who died in the good work would be at once received into glory."²¹

More than two weeks had elapsed since the attempt, so disastrous to the Turks, on the fortress of St. Michael. During this time they had kept up an unintermitting fire on the Christian fortifications; and the effect was visible in more than one fearful gap, which invited the assault of the enemy. The second

²⁰ "Esta habla del gran Maestre luego fue divulgada, y asi toda la gente se determino de primero morir que venir a manos de turcos vivos, pero tambien se determino de vender muy bien sus vidas, y asi ya no se tratava de socorro." Ibid., ubi supra.

²¹ "No quedo hombre ni muger de edad para ello que no lo ganase con devocion grandissima, y con muy firme esperança y fe de yr ala gloria, muriendo en la jornada." Ibid., fol. 71.

of August was accordingly fixed on as the day for a general attack, to be made on both Fort St. Michael, and on the bastion of Castile, which, situated at the head of the English Port, eastward of Il Borgo, flanked the line of defence on that quarter. Mustapha was to conduct in person the operations against the fort; the assault on the bastion he intrusted to Piali;— a division of the command by which the ambition of the rival chiefs would be roused to the utmost.

Fortunately, La Valette obtained notice, through some deserters, of the plans of the Turkish commanders, and made his preparations accordingly. On the morning of the second, Piali's men, at the appointed signal, moved briskly forward to the assault. They soon crossed the ditch, but partially filled with the ruins of the rampart, scaled the ascent in face of a sharp fire of musketry, and stood at length, with ranks somewhat shattered, on the summit of the breach. But here they were opposed by retrenchments within, thrown up by the besieged, from behind which they now poured such heavy volleys among the assailants as staggered the front of the column, and compelled it to fall back some paces in the rear. Here it was encountered by those pushing forward from below; and some confusion ensued. This was increased by the vigor with which the garrison now plied their musketry from the ramparts, hurling down at the same time heavy logs, hand-grenades, and torrents of scalding pitch on the heads of the assailing column, which, blinded and staggering under the shock, reeled to and fro like a drunken man. To add to their distress, the feet of the soldiers were torn and entangled

among the spikes which had been thickly set in the ruins of the breach by the besieged. Woe to him who fell! His writhing body was soon trampled under the press. In vain the Moslem chiefs endeavored to restore order. Their voices were lost in the wild uproar that raged around. At this crisis the knights, charging at the head of their followers, cleared the breach, and drove the enemy with loss into his trenches.

There the broken column soon re-formed, and, strengthened by fresh troops, was again brought to the attack. But this gave a respite to the garrison, which La Valette improved by causing refreshments to be served to the soldiers. By his provident care, skins containing wine and water, with rations of bread, were placed near the points of attack, to be distributed among the men.²² The garrison, thus strengthened, were enabled to meet the additional forces brought against them by the enemy; and the refreshments on the one side were made, in some sort, to counterbalance the reinforcements on the other. Vessels filled with salt and water were also at hand, to bathe the wounds of such as were injured by the fireworks. "Without these various precautions," says the chronicler, "it would have been impossible for so few men as we were to keep our ground against such a host as now assailed us on every quarter."²³

²² "Tenia mandado, que en todos los dias de assalto se llevassen por todas las postas adonde se peleasse, muchos buyvelos de vino aguado, y pan para refrescar su gente, pues de gente no podia." Ibid., fol. 91.

²³ "Si todas estas buenas ordenes no uviera, no bastaran fuerças humanas para resistir a tanta furia pertinacia, principalmēte siendo nosotros tan pocos, y ellos tantos." Ibid., ubi supra.

Again and again the discomfited Turks gathered strength for a new assault, and as often they were repulsed with the same loss as before; till Piali drew off his dispirited legions, and abandoned all further attempts for that day.

It fared no better on the other quarter, where the besiegers, under the eye of the commander-in-chief, were storming the fortress of St. Michael. On every point the stout-hearted chivalry of St. John were victorious. But victory was bought at a heavy price.

The Turks returned to the attack on the day following, and on each succeeding day. It was evidently their purpose to profit by their superior numbers to harass the besieged, and reduce them to a state of exhaustion. One of these assaults was near being attended with fatal consequences.

A mine which ran under the bastion of Castile was sprung, and brought down a wide extent of the rampart. The enemy, prepared for the event, mounting the smoking ruins, poured through the undefended breach,—or defended only by a handful of the garrison, who were taken unawares. The next minute, the great standard of the Ottomans was planted on the walls. The alarm was raised. In a few moments the enemy would have been in the heart of the town. An ecclesiastic of the order, Brother William by name, terrified at the sight, made all haste to the grand-master, then at his usual station in the public square. Rushing into his presence, the priest called on him to take refuge, while he could, in the castle of St. Angelo, as the enemy had broken into the town. But the dauntless chief,

snatching up his pike, with no other protection than his helmet, and calling out to those around him, "Now is the time! let us die together!"²⁴ hurried to the scene of action, where, rallying his followers, he fell furiously on the enemy. A sharp struggle ensued. More than one knight was struck down by La Valette's side. He himself was wounded in the leg by the splinter of a hand-grenade. The alarm-bell of the city rang violently. The cry was raised that the grand-master was in danger. Knights, soldiers, and townsmen came rushing to the spot. Even the sick sprang from their beds, and made such haste as they could to the rescue. The Moslems, pressed on all sides, and shaken by the resolute charge, fell back slowly on the breach.

The cavaliers would now fain have persuaded the grand-master, who was still standing among a heap of the slain, to retire to some place of safety, and leave the issue of the battle to his companions. But, fixing his eye on the Ottoman standard, still floating above the walls, he mournfully shook his head, in token of his resolution to remain. The garrison, spurred on by shame and indignation, again charged the Moslems, with greater fury than before. The colors, wrenched from the ramparts, were torn to shreds in the struggle. The Christians prevailed; and the Turks, quailing before their invincible spirit, were compelled, after a long and bloody contest, to abandon the works they had so nearly won.

²⁴ "El gran Maestre sin mudarse, ni alterarse de su semblante valeroso, dixo, Vamos a morir alla todos

cavalleros, q̄ oy es el dia." Ibid., fol. 90.

Still the grand-master, far from retiring, took up his quarters for the night in the neighborhood of the breach. He had no doubt that the enemy would return under cover of the darkness, and renew the assault before the garrison had time to throw up retrenchments. It was in vain his companions besought him to withdraw, to leave the fight to them, and not to risk a life so precious to the community. "And how can an old man like me," he said, "end his life more gloriously, than when surrounded by his brethren and fighting the battles of the Cross?"²⁵

La Valette was right in his conjecture. No sooner had the darkness fallen, than the Turkish host, again under arms, came surging on across the ruins of the rampart towards the breach. But it was not under cover of the darkness; for the whole bay was illumined by the incessant flash of artillery, by the blaze of combustibles, and the fiery track of the missiles darting through the air. Thus the combat was carried on as by the light of day. The garrison, prepared for the attack, renewed the scenes of the morning, and again beat off the assailants, who, broken and dispirited, could not be roused, even by the blows of their officers, to return to the assault.²⁶

²⁵ Vertot, *Knights of Malta*, vol. iii. p. 24.

²⁶ Vertot speaks of this last attack as having been made on the eighteenth of August. His chronology may be corrected by that of Balbi, whose narrative, taking the form of a diary, in which the transactions of each day are separately noted, bears the stamp of much greater accuracy. Balbi gives the seventh of August as the

date. For the preceding pages see Balbi, *Verdadera Relacion*, fol. 89-93.; Vertot, *Knights of Malta*, vol. iii. pp. 18-24.; Calderon, *Gloriosa Defensa de Malta*, pp. 146-150.; De Thou, *Histoire Universelle*, tom. v. p. 83. et seq.; Cabrerá, *Filipe Segundo*, lib. vi. cap. 27.; Campana, *Vita di Filippo Secondo*, tom. ii. p. 16.; Leti, *Vita di Filippo II.*, tom. i. p. 450.

On the following morning, La Valette caused *Te Deum* to be sung in the church of St. Lawrence, and thanks to be offered at the throne of grace for their deliverance. And if the ceremonies were not conducted with the accustomed pomp of the order of St. John, they were at least accompanied, says the chronicler, who bore his part in them, by the sacrifice of contrite hearts,—as was shown by the tears of many a man, as well as woman, in the procession.²⁷

There was indeed almost as much cause for sorrow as for joy. However successful the Christians had been in maintaining their defence, and however severe the loss they had inflicted on the enemy, they had to mourn the loss of some of their most illustrious knights, while others lay disabled in their beds. Among the latter was De Monti, admiral of the order, now lying seriously ill of wounds received in the defence of St. Michael, of which he was commander. Among the deaths was one which came home to the bosom of La Valette. A young cavalier, his nephew, had engaged in a perilous enterprise with a comrade of his own age. The handsome person and gilded armor of the younger La Valette made him a fatal mark for the enemy²⁸; and he fell, together with his friend, in the ditch before the bastion, under a shower of Turkish bullets. An obstinate struggle succeeded between Christians and Turks for the bodies of the

²⁷ "Y sino solenne como en esta religion se suele hazer, alomenos cõtrita a lo que las lagrimas de muchos hombres y mugeres davan señal." Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 94.

²⁸ "Y como el comendador era hombre de linda disposicion, y armado de unas armas doradas y ricas, los turcos tiraron todos a el." Ibid., fol. 76.

slain. The Christians were victorious; and La Valette had the melancholy satisfaction of rendering the last offices to the remains of his gallant kinsman. The brethren would have condoled with him on his loss. But his generous nature shrank from the indulgence of a selfish sorrow. "All are alike dear to me," he said; "all of you I look on as my children. I mourn for Polastra" (the friend of the young La Valette) "as I do for my own nephew. And after all, it matters little. They have gone before us but for a short time."²⁹

It was indeed no season for the indulgence of private sorrows, when those of a public nature pressed so heavily on the heart. Each day the condition of the besieged was becoming more critical. The tottering defences both of Il Borgo and La Sangle were wasting away under the remorseless batteries of the besiegers. Great numbers, not merely of the knights and the soldiers, but of the inhabitants, had been slain. The women of the place had shown, throughout the whole siege, the same heroic spirit as the men. They not only discharged the usual feminine duties of tending and relieving the sick, but they were often present in the battle, supplying the garrison with refreshments, or carrying the ammunition, or removing the wounded to the hospital. Thus sharing in the danger of their husbands and fathers, they shared too in their fate. Many perished by the enemy's fire; and the dead bodies of women lay mingled among

²⁹ Ibid., ubi supra. — Vertot, *Knights of Malta*, vol. iii. p. 14.

those of the men, on the ramparts and in the streets.³⁰ The hospitals were filled with the sick and wounded, though fortunately no epidemic had as yet broken out to swell the bills of mortality. Those of the garrison who were still in a condition to do their duty were worn by long vigils and excessive toil. To fight by day, to raise intrenchments or to repair the crumbling works by night, was the hard duty of the soldier. Brief was the respite allowed him for repose,—a repose to be broken at any moment by the sound of the alarm-bell, and to be obtained only amidst so wild an uproar, that it seemed, in the homely language of the veteran so often quoted, “as if the world were coming to an end.”³¹

Happily, through the provident care of the grand-master, there was still a store of provisions in the magazines. But the ammunition was already getting low. Yet the resolution of the besieged did not fail them. Their resolution had doubtless been strengthened by the cruel conduct of the Turks at St. Elmo, which had shown that from such a foe there was no mercy to be expected. The conviction of this had armed the Christians with the courage of despair. On foreign succor they no longer relied. Their only reliance was where their chief had taught them to place it,—on the protection of Heaven; and La Valette, we are assured, went every day during the siege to the church of St. Lawrence, and there solemnly invoked that protection for the brave men

³⁰ Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 66. 82.

³¹ Ibid. fol. 78.

who, alone and unaided, were thus fighting the battles of the Faith.³²

The forlorn condition of the defences led, at length, the Council of Grand Crosses, after much deliberation, to recommend to La Valette to abandon Il Borgo, and to withdraw with the troops and the inhabitants into the castle of St. Angelo. The grand-master saw at once the disastrous consequences of such a step, and he rejected it without a moment's hesitation. To withdraw into the castle, he said, would be to give up all communication with St. Michael, and to abandon its brave garrison to their fate. The inhabitants of the town would fare no better. The cistern which supplied St. Angelo with water would be wholly inadequate to the demands of such a multitude; and they would soon be reduced to extremity. "No, my brethren," he concluded; "here we must make our stand; and here we must die, if we cannot maintain ourselves against the infidel."³³

He would not even consent to have the sacred relics, or the archives of the order, removed thither, as to a place of greater security. It would serve to discourage the soldiers, by leading them to suppose that he distrusted their power of maintaining the town against the enemy. On the contrary, he caused a bridge communicating with the castle to be broken down, after calling off the greater part of the garrison to assist in the defence of Il Borgo. By these measures, he proclaimed his unalterable determina-

³² "Muchas vezes solo se yva a san Lorenzo, y alli en su apartamiento hazia sus oraciones. Y eneste exercicio se occupava quan-

do se tenia algun sosiego." Ibid., fol. 84.

³³ Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. iii. p. 29.

tion to maintain the town to the last, and, if need were, to die in its defence.³⁴

³⁴ "Lo qual sabido por el gran Maestre como aquel que jamas penso sino morir el primo por su religion, y por quitar toda sospecha despues de aver hecho llevar en sant Angel todas las reliquias y cosas de mas valor, mando quitar la puente, dando a entender a todo

el mundo que enel no avia retirar, sino morir en el Burgo, o defenderlo." Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 94.

See also Vertot, Knights of Malta, vol. iii. p. 29.; Calderon, Gloriosa Defensa de Malta, p. 167. et seq.



P.C. Monumental de la Alhambra y Generalife
CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA

CHAPTER V.

SIEGE OF MALTA.

The Turks dispirited.—Reinforcement from Sicily.—Siege raised.—Mustapha defeated.—Rejoicings of the Christians.—Mortification of Solyman.—Review of the Siege.—Subsequent History of La Valette.

1565.

WHILE the affairs of the besieged wore the gloomy aspect depicted in the last chapter, those of the besiegers were not much better. More than half their original force had perished. To the bloody roll of those who had fallen in the numerous assaults were now to be added the daily victims of pestilence. In consequence of the great heat, exposure, and bad food, a dysentery had broken out in the Moslem army, and was now sweeping off its hundreds in a day. Both ammunition and provisions were running low. Ships bringing supplies were constantly intercepted by the Sicilian cruisers. Many of the heavy guns were so much damaged by the fire of the besieged, as to require to be withdrawn and sent on board the fleet,—an operation performed with a silence that contrasted strongly with the noisy shouts with which the batteries had been raised.¹ But these movements

¹ “Ya seles conocia, que les faltavan muchas piezas que avian embarcado, y cada noche se sentia como las retiravan, ala sorda sin

los alaridos que davan al principio quando las plantaron.” Balbi, Verdadera Relacion, fol. 101.

could not be conducted so silently as to escape the notice of the garrison, whose spirits were much revived by the reports daily brought in by deserters of the condition of the enemy.

Mustapha chafed not a little under the long-protracted resistance of the besieged. He looked with apprehension to the consequences of a failure in an expedition for which preparations had been made on so magnificent a scale by his master, and with so confident hopes of success. He did not fail to employ every expedient for effecting his object that the military science of that day — at least Turkish science — could devise. He ordered movable wooden towers to be built, such as were used under the ancient system of besieging fortified places, from which, when brought near to the works, his musketeers might send their volleys into the town. But the besieged, sallying forth, set fire to his towers, and burned them to the ground. He caused a huge engine to be made, of the capacity of a hogshead; filled with combustibles, and then swung, by means of machinery, on the rampart of the bastion. But the garrison succeeded in throwing it back on the heads of the inventors, where it exploded with terrible effect. Mustapha ran his mines under the Christian defences, until the ground was perforated like a honey-comb, and the garrison seemed to be treading on the crust of a volcano. La Valette countermined in his turn. The Christians, breaking into the galleries of the Turks, engaged them boldly underground; and sometimes the mine, exploding, buried both Turk and Christian under a heap of ruins.

Baffled on every point, with their ranks hourly thinned by disease, the Moslem troops grew sullen and dispirited; and now that the bastion of Castile, with its dilapidated works, stood like some warrior stripped of his armor, his defenceless condition inviting attack, they were in no heart to make it. As their fire slackened, and their assaults became fewer and more feeble, the confidence of the Christians was renewed; until they even cherished the hope of beating off the enemy without the long-promised succors from Sicily. Fortunately for the honor of Spain, the chivalry of St. John were not driven to this perilous attempt.

Yielding, at length, to the solicitations of the knights and the enthusiasm of the army, the viceroy, Don Garcia de Toledo, assembled his fleet in the port of Syracuse, and on the 25th of August weighed anchor. The fleet consisted of twenty-eight galleys, and carried eleven thousand troops, chiefly Spanish veterans, besides two hundred knights of the order, who had arrived from other lands, in time to witness the closing scene of the drama. There was also a good number of adventurers from Spain, France, and Italy, many of them persons of rank, and some of high military renown, who had come to offer their services to the knights of Malta, and share in their glorious defence.

Unfortunately, in its short passage, the fleet encountered a violent gale, which did so much damage, that the viceroy was compelled to return to Sicily, and repair his galleys. He then put to sea again, with better fortune. He succeeded in avoiding the