

KNIGHTS OF MALTA

1523-1798

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KNIGHTS OF MALTA

CHAPTER I

SETTLEMENT AT MALTA 1523-1565.

On January 1, 1523, a fleet of fifty vessels put out from the harbour at Rhodes for an unknown destination in the West. On board were the shattered remnants of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, accompanied by 4,000 Rhodians, who preferred the Knights and destitution to security under the rule of the Sultan Solyman. The little fleet was in a sad and piteous condition. Many of those on board were wounded; all--Knights and Rhodians alike--were in a state of extreme poverty. For six months they had resisted the full might of the Ottoman Empire under its greatest Sultan, Solyman the Magnificent; Europe had looked on in amazed admiration, but had not ventured to move to its rescue. Now they were leaving the home their Order had

possessed for 212
years, and were sailing out to beg from Christendom
another station
from which to attack the infidel once again.

The Knights of Rhodes--as they were called at the time--
were the
only real survivors of the militant Order of Chivalry. Two
centuries
earlier their great rivals, the Templars, had been
dissolved, and a
large part of their endowments handed over to the
Hospitallers. The
great secret of the long and enduring success of the
Order of St. John
was their capacity for adapting themselves to the
changing needs of
the times. The final expulsion of the Christians from Syria
had left
the Templars idle and helpless, and the loss of the
outlets for their
energy soon brought corruption and decay with the swift
consequence of
dissolution. All through the history of the great Orders we
find
the Kings of Europe on the lookout for a chance to seize
their
possessions: any excuse or pretext is used, sometimes
most
shamelessly. An Order of Knighthood that failed to
perform the duties
for which it was founded was soon overtaken by disaster.

The Hospitallers had realised, as early as 1300, that their
former
rôle of mounted Knights fighting on land was gone for
ever. From their
seizure of Rhodes, in 1310, they became predominantly
seamen, whose
flag, with its eight-pointed cross, struck terror into every
infidel
heart. Nothing but a combination of Christian monarchs
could cope with
the superiority of the Turk on land: by sea he was still

vulnerable.
The Knights took up their new part with all their old
energy and
determination: it is but typical that henceforward we
never hear of
the "Knights" of Malta fighting as cavalry.

After various adventures the fleet found itself united at
Messina,
whence it proceeded to Baiae. The election to the
papacy of the
Cardinal de' Medici--one of their own Order--as Clement
VII., gave the
Knights a powerful protector. He assigned Viterbo as a
residence for
the Order till a permanent home had been discovered.

Villiers de L'Isle Adam, Grand Master of the Order, was
faced with
many difficulties. Remembering the fate of the Templars,
he was afraid
that the Order would disperse, and its present helpless
condition was
surely tending to disintegration. At this time the war
between Charles
V. and Francis I. was at its height, and the quarrel
between France
and Spain was reflected within the ranks of the
Hospitallers. As the
French and Spanish Knights formed the greater part of
the members, the
unity of the Order was threatened by the quarrels
between them
that arose out of national sentiment. The Reformation
was rapidly
spreading, and was likely to prove dangerous to the
lands of the Order
in Northern Europe, and various monarchs were
meditating the seizure
of the Hospitallers' estates now that the Order was
temporarily
without a justification for its existence.

The Grand Master showed himself a skilful diplomat, as

well as a brave
soldier. From 1523 to 1530 the Order remained without a
home, while
L'Isle Adam visited the different European courts to stay
the grasping
hands of the various Kings. All this time negotiations
were proceeding
between Charles V. and the Knights for the cession of
Malta. The
harsh conditions which the Emperor insisted upon in his
offer made
the Knights reluctant to accept, while his preoccupation
with the war
against France made negotiations difficult. Further, the
cause of
the Knights had been damaged when the Pope--who had
acted as their
intercessor--joined the ranks of Charles's enemies, and
Clement
VII. was now a prisoner in the Emperor's hands. In
March, 1530, an
agreement was finally arrived at, which was the most
favourable
the Emperor would grant. One harassing burden the
Knights could not
escape: Charles insisted that Tripoli must go with Malta,
a gift which
meant a useless drain upon their weak resources, and
which fell
in 1551 to Dragut-Reis and the Turkish forces at the first
serious
attack. L'Isle Adam had insisted that he could not take
the island
over as a feudatory to the King of Spain, as that was
contrary to the
fundamental idea of the Order--its impartiality in its
relations to
all the Christian Powers. The only condition of service,
therefore,
that was made was nominal: the Grand Master
henceforth was to send, on
All Souls' Day, a falcon to the Viceroy of Sicily as a token
of feudal
sub-mission.[1]

This was a splendid bargain for the Emperor. Malta had hitherto been worthless to him, but henceforth it became one of the finest bulwarks of his dominions. To understand the supreme value of the island, we must take a glance at sea power in the Mediterranean in the sixteenth century.

The beginning of the century had seen the growth of the Corsairs' strength to a most alarming extent. While all the European Powers were fighting among themselves, these Barbary Corsairs (as they were later called) had become the terror of the Western Mediterranean. Spain, by its unrelenting persecution of the Moriscos, following on centuries of bitter conflict between Christian and Mussulman, had earned the undying hatred of the dwellers on the North African coast, many of whom were the children of the expelled Moors. These Moors had wasted their energy in desultory warfare up to the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the genius of the two brothers, Uruj and Khair-ed-Din Barbarossa, had organised them into the pirate State of Algiers, which was to be a thorn in the side of Christendom for over three centuries. The Corsairs were not content with merely attacking ships at sea: they made raids on the Spanish, Italian, and Sicilian seaboards, burning and looting for many miles inland. The inhabitants of these parts were driven off as captives to fill the bagnios of Algiers, Tunis, Bizerta, and other North African towns. These prisoners were

used as galley
slaves, and the life of a galley slave was generally so
short that
there was no difficulty of disposing of all the captives that
could
be seized. Cupidity, allied with fanaticism, gave this state
of war a
cruelty beyond conception: both sides displayed such
undaunted courage
and such fierce personal hatred as to make men wonder,
even in
that hard and bitter century. Those low-lying galleys,
which were
independent of the wind, were ideal pirates' craft in the
gentle
Mediterranean summer, and many a slumbering Spanish
or Italian village
would be startled into terror by their sudden approach.
The audacity
of their methods is illustrated by the raid on Fundi in
1534,
when Barbarossa swooped down on that town simply to
seize Giulia
Gonzaga--reputed the loveliest woman in Italy--for the
Sultan's harem:
the fair Duchess of Trajetto hardly escaped in her
nightdress.

The Eastern Mediterranean, after the capture of Rhodes,
was almost
entirely a Turkish preserve. Though Venice at this period
still kept
her hold on Cyprus and Crete, the former of which was
not yielded by
the Republic till 1573 and the latter till 1669, yet the
Treaty of
Constantinople in 1479 had definitely reduced the
position of Venice
in the Levant from an independent Power to a tolerated
ally. The
growth of the Ottoman sea power had been alarming
enough, but it
became a distinct menace to the Christian Powers of the
Mediterranean

when the Corsair chiefs of the North African coast became Turkish vassals. All the African coast from Morocco to Suez, the coast of Asia Minor, and the European coast from the Bosphorus to Albania (with the exception of a few islands), were in Turkish hands. From 1475, with the conquest of the Crimea, the Black Sea had become a Turkish lake, and under Solyman the Magnificent the Turks had become masters of Aden and the Red Sea, with a strong influence along the Arabian and Persian coasts.

Malta, then as always, was of supreme strategic importance for the domination of the Mediterranean. It lay right in the centre of the narrow channel connecting the Eastern and Western Mediterranean, and, in the hands of such a small but splendidly efficient band of sailors as the Knights Hospitallers, was sure to become a source of vexation to the mighty Turkish Empire. Though not so convenient as Rhodes for attacking Turkish merchant shipping, yet it had one advantage, in that it lay close to Christian shores and could easily be succoured in the hour of need. A small, highly defensible island, strengthened by all the resources of engineering, it could, and did, become one of the most invulnerable fortresses in the world, and of the utmost importance for the control of the Mediterranean.

Charles V., therefore, made a splendid bargain when he handed over the neglected island to the Order of St. John, even had the gift been

unconditional. The Knights rendered him valuable service by sharing in the several expeditions the Spaniards undertook to the African coast. Barbarossa, by the capture of Tunis from the old Hafside dynasty in 1534, threatened the important channel between Sicily and Africa, which it was essential for Charles V. to keep open. In the next year, therefore, the Emperor attacked the town and conquered it without much difficulty. The victory was unfortunately stained by the inhuman excesses of the Imperial troops, and Charles's hold on Tunis was very short-lived. In 1541 came the miserable fiasco of the Spanish expedition to Algiers. Here, also, the Knights behaved with their usual bravery; but Charles's disregard of the advice of his Admiral, Andrea Doria, resulted in the failure of the whole expedition. In these and other expeditions the Knights took part: some--like the attack in 1550 on Mehedia[2]--were successful, others--like the siege of the Isle of Jerbah in 1559--ended in disaster.

Such was the importance of Malta when the Knights took over the island in 1530. The first need was to put it into a state of defence. On the northeast of the island was the promontory of Mount Sceberras, flanked by the two fine harbours, the Marsa Muscetto and what was later known as the Grand Harbour.[3] The eastern side of the Grand Harbour was broken by three prominent peninsulas, later occupied by Fort Ricasoli, Fort St. Angelo, and Fort St. Michael. The only fortification in 1530

was the Fort of St. Angelo, with a few guns and very weak walls. The intention of the Knights, even from the beginning, was to make the main peninsula, Mount Sceberras, the seat of their "Convent"; but as that would mean the leveling of the whole promontory, a task of enormous expense and difficulty, and as immediate defence was necessary, they decided to occupy the Peninsula of St. Angelo for the present. Wedged between St. Angelo and the mainland there was a small town, "Il Borgo": this, for the present, the Knights made their headquarters, drawing a line of entrenchments across the neck of the promontory to guard it from the neighboring heights.

When it became certain that Malta was to be its permanent home--for L'Isle Adam had at first cherished hopes of recapturing Rhodes--the Order proceeded to take further measures for its security. Both St. Angelo and Il Borgo were strengthened with ramparts and artillery, and the fortifications of the Città Notabile, the main town in the centre of the island, were improved. In 1552 a commission of three Knights with Leo Strozzi, the Prior of Capua, at its head--one of the most daring Corsairs of the day--made a report of the fortifications of the island. They recommended strengthening Il Borgo and St. Angelo, and pointed out that the whole promontory was commanded by St. Julian, the southernmost of the three projections into the Grand Harbour. Further, as it was necessary to command the entrances both of Marsa Muscetto

and of the Grand Harbour, the tip, at least, of Mount Sceberras should be occupied, as the finances of the Order would not allow of anything further being done. These recommendations were carried out, and Fort St. Michael was built on St. Julian and Fort St. Elmo on the end of Mount Sceberras. A few years later the Grand Master de la Sangle supplied the obvious deficiencies of St. Julian by enclosing it on the west and the south by a bastioned rampart.

Now the commitments of the Order in Tripoli proved a constant drain on its resources. Time after time Charles V. was appealed to for help in holding Tripoli, which was very difficult to fortify because of the sandy nature of the soil, and difficult to succour because of its distance from Malta. But Charles V. was at once reluctant to let go his grip of any parts of the African coast, and too much absorbed by his own troubles to be able to render much help, however much he might have desired to do so. It was obvious that the first determined attack of the Turks would mean the fall of Tripoli. In 1551, after putting in an appearance off Malta, Dragut, the successor of Barbarossa, sailed to Tripoli and easily captured the place owing to the disaffection of the mercenary troops in the garrison.

During this period, 1523-1565, the Order lost for ever one of the eight national divisions or "langues." Henry VIII., soon after the fall of Rhodes, had shown himself unfriendly to the interests of the

Order, but had been appeased by a visit of L'Isle Adam in February, 1528.[4] But Henry's proceedings against the Pope and the monasteries inevitably involved the Order of St. John, which had large possessions both in England and in Ireland. The Grand Priory of England was situated at Clerkenwell, and the Grand Prior held the position in the House of Lords of the connecting link between the Lords Spiritual and the Barons, coming after the former in rank and before the latter. There is extant a letter written by Henry VIII. in 1538 to the Grand Master, Juan d'Omedes, wherein conditions are laid down for the maintenance of the Order in England. The two main stipulations were, that any Englishman admitted into the Order must take an oath of allegiance to the King, and that no member in England must in any way recognise the jurisdiction or authority of the Pope. Henry was well aware that the Knights could never consent to terms such as these, which were the negation of the fundamental principle of international neutrality of their Order. Henry's offers were refused, and the English langue, which had a brilliant record in the Order, perished. Many of the Knights fled to Malta; others were executed for refusing obedience to the Act of Supremacy. A general confiscation of their property took place, and in April, 1540, an Act of Parliament was passed vesting all the property of the Order in the Crown, and setting aside from the revenues of such properties certain pensions to be

paid to the Lord Prior and other members. The Grand
Prior, Sir William
Weston, died soon after, before he could enjoy his
pension of £1,000 a
year.

With the accession of Mary, in 1553, negotiations were at
once opened
with the Knights for the restoration of the English langue,
and during
her reign the old Order was restored once again, though
the lands
were not returned. But Elizabeth, in the first year of her
reign,
suppressed the Knights for good and all.

In North Africa, Philip II., on his accession, had taken
over the
troubles of his father, and after the Corsairs had failed in
their
attack on the Spanish ports of Oran and Mazarquivir, he
carried the
war once more into the enemy's territory. Finding
themselves isolated,
they appealed to their overlord, the aged Sultan
Solyman, to help them
against Spain.

The most important seaman on the Turkish side was
Dragut--Pasha
of Tripoli since 1551--who had been the greatest of
Barbarossa's
lieutenants. In 1540 Dragut had been surprised and
captured by
Giannetin Doria, the nephew of the great Admiral, and
had served four
years chained to the bench of a Genoese galley. One of
the last acts
of Khair-ed-Din Barbarossa had been to ransom his
follower in the
port of Genoa, in 1544, for 3,000 crowns, an
arrangement of which the
Genoese afterwards sorely repented. Dragut had the ear
of the Sultan

when the appeal for help came from Africa, and his suggestion was to attempt the capture of Malta. It had become more and more certain that the Turks would not leave the island unassailed. Not only did the Knights lend splendid help to the various Christian Powers, but they were in themselves a formidable foe. Their fleet was always small, six or seven galleys, but they became the dread of every Turkish vessel in the Mediterranean. Annually these red galleys, headed by their black _capitana_, swooped down on the Turkish shipping of the Levant and brought back many rich prizes. Malta grew steadily in wealth, and the island became full of Turkish slaves. The generals of the Maltese galleys, Strozzi, La Valette, Charles of Lorraine, and De Romegas, were far more terrible even than the great Corsairs, because of their determination to extirpate the infidel. The state of war between the Order and the Mussulman was recognised by all as something unique; neither side dreamt of a peace or a truce, and only once in the history of the Order does there seem to have been the suggestion of an agreement. The fanaticism which actuated the Knights in their determination to destroy the infidel made them formidable enemies, despite their fewness in number. Solyman the Magnificent must have often repented of his clemency in letting the Knights leave Rhodes alive, and in 1564 he decided it would be a fitting end to his reign if he could destroy the worst pest of the Mediterranean by capturing

Malta and annihilating the Order of St. John of
Jerusalem.

[Footnote 1: Vide Appendix I.]

[Footnote 2: The chroniclers, such as Vertot, often call
this town,
which was the ancient Adrumetum, "Africa," and it is
therefore
necessary to watch their use of that word carefully.]

[Footnote 3: See map on p. 19.]

[Footnote 4: This visit caused a great sensation in
Europe, as De
L'Isle Adam crossed the Alps in the depth of winter, and
this haste to
pay his respects touched the King of England.]

CHAPTER II

THE SIEGE OF MALTA

1565.

The Grand Master of the Knights of Malta in 1565 was
Jean Parisot de
la Valette. Born in 1494 of a noble family in Quercy, he
had been
a Knight of St. John all his life, and forty-three years
before had
distinguished himself at the siege of Rhodes. He had
never left
his post at the "Convent" except to go on his
"caravans,"^[1] as the
cruises in the galleys were named. As a commander of
the galleys of
the "Religion," as the Order called itself, he had won a
name that

stood conspicuous in that age of great sea captains; and
in 1557, on
the death of the Grand Master de la Sangle, the Knights,
mindful of
the attack that was sure to come, elected La Valette to
the vacant
office. No better man could be found even in the ranks of
the Order.

Passionately religious, devoted body and soul to his
Order and faith,
Jean de la Valette was prepared to suffer all to the death
rather than
yield a foot to the hated infidel. Unsparing of himself, he
demanded
utter sacrifice from his subordinates, and his cold,
unflinching
severity would brook no hesitation.

Both sides spent the winter and spring of 1565 in
preparations for
the great attack. The Grand Master sent a message to all
the Powers
of Europe; but Philip II., who sent him some troops, and
the Pope,
who sent him 10,000 crowns, alone responded to his
appeal. The message
sent to the various commanderies[2] throughout Europe
brought the
Knights in haste to the defence of their beloved Convent.
The Maltese
Militia was organised and drilled and proved of great
value in the
siege, and even 500 galley slaves were released on
promise of faithful
service. Altogether La Valette seems to have had at his
disposal about
9,000 men (though the authorities differ slightly as to the
exact
figures). Of these over 600 were Knights with their
attendants, about
1,200 were hired troops, about 1,000 were volunteers,
chiefly from
Italy, and the remainder Maltese Militia and galley slaves.

The Turkish fleet at the beginning consisted of 180 vessels, of which 130 were galleys; and the troops on board consisted of about 30,000 men, of whom 6,000 belonged to the select troops of the Janissaries.

Twice during the siege the Ottomans received reinforcements: first, Dragut himself with 13 galleys and 1,600 men, and later, Hassan, Viceroy of Algiers and son of Khair-ed-Din Barbarossa, with 2,500 Corsairs. Altogether the Ottoman forces at the maximum, inclusive of sailors, must have exceeded 40,000 men. A small reinforcement of 700 men, of whom 42 were Knights, contrived to steal through the Turkish lines on June 29; but that was all the help the garrison received before September.

[Illustration: PLAN TO ILLUSTRATE SIEGE OF MALTA 1565]

The Turkish army was under the command of Mustapha Pasha, and the fleet under that of Piali. Both had received orders not to take any steps without the advice of Dragut. It would have been far better for the Turkish cause had the Corsair been in supreme command, for his skill as an artilleryman was famous. But there had always been trouble in the Ottoman fleet when a Corsair was in command. The proud Turkish generals were unwilling to be under the orders of men who were of doubtful antecedents, and whom they despised in their hearts as low-born robbers. Even Barbarossa, acknowledged by all to be the greatest seaman in the Turkish Empire, could not enforce

strict
obedience in the campaign of Prevesa in 1538. The
Grand Vizier Ibrahim
had seen the folly of putting generals in command of
fleets, and had
therefore secured the promotion of Barbarossa: but
Ibrahim was now
dead, and Solyman, bereft of his wise counsel, made a
compromise.

On May 18 the Turkish fleet was sighted off the island,
and almost
immediately the army disembarked, partly at Marsa
Scirocco, and partly
at St. Thomas's Bay. The first misfortune was the non-
appearance
of Dragut at the rendezvous, and in his absence
Mustapha and Piali
decided to attack St. Elmo and to leave to Dragut the
responsibility
of sanctioning the operations or breaking them off.
Batteries were
erected on Mount Sceberras, in which ten 80-pounders
were brought into
action, besides a huge basilisk throwing balls of 160
pounds, and two
60-pounder coulevrines. The Turks at the height of
their power put
great faith in novel and massive artillery, which, though
clumsy,
and at times more dangerous to their own gunners than
the enemy, was
terribly effective at the short distance it was placed from
St. Elmo.

The walls of the fortress soon began to crumble under
the continuous
bombardment, and the garrison, which had been
increased to 120
Knights and two companies of Spanish infantry, soon felt
the position
untenable without reinforcements. As an attack had not
yet been
delivered La Valette was incensed at the appeal for help
and offered

to go himself to hold the fort; his council dissuaded him
from doing
so, and he permitted 50 Knights and 200 Spanish troops
to cross to St.

Elmo. It was of the utmost importance that St. Elmo
should be held to
the last minute. Not only did it delay the attack on the
main forts,
but Don Garcia de Toledo, the Viceroy of Sicily, had
made it a
condition in his arrangements with the Grand Master,
before the siege,
that St. Elmo must be held if the reinforcements from
Sicily were to
be sent.

At this point--June 2--Dragut arrived with his galleys and
expressed
nothing but disapproval for the Turkish operations. He
pointed out
that the besiegers should have isolated the fortifications
from the
rest of the island before proceeding to attack St. Elmo;
but, as
the siege had started, he insisted on continuing it as
vigorously
as possible. He erected a powerful battery on the summit
of Mount
Sceberras, which swept both Fort St. Angelo and Fort St.
Elmo, and
erected another on the headland opposite St. Elmo on
the other side of
the Marsa Muscetto, which was henceforth known as
Point Dragut.

As soon as this was done the bombardment restarted
with relentless
fury. The Knights made a sortie to destroy some of the
Turkish guns,
but were driven back, and the Turks then captured and
held a covered
way leading up to a ravelin; a few days later, taking
advantage of the
negligence of the garrison, they surprised the ravelin

itself, and,
but for the efforts of a Spanish officer, would have
captured the
fort. After desperate fighting the Knights were still holding
the
fort, but had been unable to recapture the ravelin. The
next day
another attack was made by Mustapha, but without avail;
the ravelin
remained in Turkish hands, but it had cost them 2,000
men.

It was a great gain, however; two guns were mounted on
it, and all the
Turkish artillery, including that of the galleys, began to
play on the
hapless fort. It was no question of a breach; the walls
were gradually
destroyed till there was nothing left of the enceinte but a
mass of
ruins. Every part of the fort was directly exposed to the
fire of
the two guns on the ravelin, and this exposure made the
strain on the
Knights intolerable.

The garrison sent a Knight, renowned for his bravery, to
report these
conditions to the Grand Master and to ask for permission
to withdraw.
La Valette, feeling it imperative that the fort should hold
out to the
last minute, sent him back with orders that it was to be
defended to
the end. The garrison, amazed by his reply, sent a prayer
for relief,
failing which they would sally forth, sword in hand, to
meet their
death in open fight rather than be buried like dogs
beneath the ruins.
The Grand Master received the request with the stern
comment that, not
only were their lives at the disposal of the Order, but the
time and

manner of their death; but to make sure that their complaints were justified he would send three Knights to investigate the condition of the fort. One of the three (probably in collusion with La Valette) maintained the fort could be held, and offered himself to hold it with volunteers, who were immediately forthcoming in large numbers; but when the message arrived at St. Elmo announcing that the garrison was to be relieved, there was consternation among the defenders, who, now realising the ignominy of their prayer, sent out yet another request to St. Angelo, this time to be allowed to hold St. Elmo to the death.

After some delay the Grand Master granted the permission.

This was June 14; on the 16th the Ottomans delivered a grand assault.

The fort was attacked on three sides, from Mount Sceberras and on each flank. The guns of St. Angelo rendered great service all day by raking the attacking forces in enfilade, and especially by breaking up the flank attack from the side of the Grand Harbour. All day long the battle went on with unabating fury; time after time the Janissaries burst over the ruined walls, and each time they were repulsed.

Attacked on all sides, the few defenders fought with dauntless heroism, and when the night fell the Maltese Cross still waved over the fort.

Reinforcements were dispatched as soon as night set in, and the volunteers far exceeded all requirements.

Now at last the Turkish commanders perceived that, to
capture St.
Elmo, it must be isolated from St. Angelo. In the course
of the next
few days a battery was constructed on the promontory at
the entrance
of the Grand Harbour where Fort Ricasoli stood in later
times, and
another was mounted on the side of Mount Sceberras to
sweep the
landing place beneath the fort. Both batteries cost many
Turkish
lives, but their construction and the extension of the
investing
trenches to the Grand Harbour meant the complete
isolation of St.
Elmo. The Turks sustained their greatest loss when
Dragut, while
superintending the works, received a wound from which
a week later he
died.

For three days twenty-six guns kept up the
bombardment, and on the
early morning of June 22 another grand assault was
made. Three times
repulsed and three times renewed, the attack failed in the
end, and
the handful of surviving Knights was left at nightfall in
possession
of their ruins. All attempts during the night to send
reinforcements
failed under the fire of Dragut's new batteries, and La
Valette saw
that his men were beyond all hope of rescue.

The sixty shattered survivors prepared for death; worn
out, they
betook themselves at midnight to their little chapel, where
they
confessed and received the Eucharist for the last time.
Dawn found
them waiting, even to the wounded, who had been

placed in chairs sword
in hand to receive the last onslaught. Incredible as it may
appear,
the first assault was driven back, but the attack finally
broke up
the defence, and, with the exception of a few Maltese
who escaped by
swimming, the garrison perished to a man.

June 24, St. John the Baptist's Day, was one of sorrow
inside the
beleaguered fortress. The Turks had soiled their victory
by mutilating
their dead foes and throwing them into the Grand
Harbour; La Valette
took reprisals, and from that time neither side thought of
quarter.

Nor were the besiegers greatly elated; the tiny Fort of St.
Elmo had
delayed them for five weeks and had cost them 8,000
men and their best
general. The Order had lost 1,300 men, of whom 130
were Knights, and
the disparity of the losses shows the impatience and
recklessness of
the Turkish attacks.

Mustapha now transferred the main part of his army to
the other side
of the Grand Harbour, and, drawing a line of
entrenchments along the
heights on its eastern side, succeeded in investing
completely the two
peninsulas of Senglea and Il Borgo. Batteries were
established and a
constant bombardment commenced, the main target
being Fort St. Michael
at the end of Senglea, on which a converging fire was
brought to bear.
Unable to bring his fleet into the Grand Harbour under
the guns of St.
Angelo, Mustapha had eighty galleys dragged across the
neck of Mount

Sceberras and launched on the upper waters of the Grand Harbour. This was a blow to the besieged, as it meant an attack by sea as well as by land, and La Valette made all the preparations possible to meet the danger. Along the south-west side of Senglea, where the beach is low, he constructed, with the aid of his Maltese divers, a very firm and powerful stockade to prevent the enemy galleys from running ashore, and he also linked up Il Borgo and Senglea with a floating bridge.

On July 15 the Turks delivered a grand assault by sea and by land. The attack by sea, under the command of the renegade Candellissa, proved the more formidable. At the critical moment the defenders were thrown into confusion by an explosion on the ramparts, during which the Turks were able to make their way through the stockade and into the fortress, being checked with difficulty by the desperate resistance of the garrison and finally driven out by a timely reinforcement sent by La Valette. Ten boatloads of troops sent by Mustapha incautiously exposed themselves to the guns of St. Angelo and were almost all sunk, while the attack on the land side, led by Hassan, Viceroy of Algiers and son of Khaired-Din Barbarossa, proved an utter failure.

As at the siege of Rhodes, so at Malta, a distinct part of the fortifications had been allotted to each langue to defend. The langue of Castile held the north-east section of Il Borgo, which was destined

to be the scene of most desperate fighting.

On August 7 a joint attack was made on the land side of Senglea and on the bastion of Castile. On that day the Turks came nearer success than ever before or after. Mustapha's desperate attacks on Senglea were at last successful: masters of the breach made by their guns, the assailants' weight of numbers began to tell, and slowly the defenders were being pushed back inside the fortress. At this moment, to everyone's amazement, Mustapha sounded the retreat. The little garrison of the Città Notabile, which had been left alone by the Turks, had been raiding the enemy's lines as usual, and, hearing the grand assault was in progress, had made a determined attack on the Turkish entrenchments from behind, burning and slaying all they could find. The confusion arising from this started the rumour that Sicilian reinforcements had landed and were attacking the Turkish army. Mustapha, in fear of being surrounded, drew off his troops in the moment of victory.

Meanwhile,[3] farther north, the Bastion of Castile had been almost captured by Piali. The rock at that part of the fortification was extremely hard, and the possibility of mines had occurred to none of the garrison. Piali, however, with great labour, had dug a mine which had been sprung that morning and had blown a huge gap in the ramparts. This unexpected attack threw the whole of Il Borgo into confusion,

and, but for the Grand Master's promptitude and coolness of mind, the enemy had been masters of the fortress. Seizing a pike, La Valette rushed into the fight, and, inspired by his example, the Knights succeeded in driving the enemy out of the breach. He ordered the garrison to remain there all night, as he expected an attack under the cover of darkness, and insisted on taking the command himself. His subordinates protested against this reckless exposure of a valuable life, but his precautions were justified when a Turkish attack made in the darkness was defeated by his prompt resistance.

The bombardment continued unceasingly, and on August 18 another desperate assault was made, which, like the other, failed. Yet the position of the besieged was becoming desperate: dwindling daily in numbers, they were becoming too feeble to hold the long line of fortifications; but, when his council suggested the abandonment of Il Borgo and Senglea and withdrawal to St. Angelo, La Valette remained obdurate.

Why the Viceroy of Sicily had not brought help will always remain a mystery. Possibly the orders of his master, Philip II. of Spain, were so obscurely worded as to put on his own shoulders the burden of a decision; a responsibility which he was unwilling to discharge because the slightest defeat would mean exposing Sicily to the Turk. He had left his own son with La Valette, so he could hardly be indifferent to

the fate of the fortress, and Malta in Turkish hands would soon have proved a curse to Sicily and Naples. Whatever may have been the cause of his delay, the Viceroy hesitated till the indignation of his own officers forced him to move, and then the battle had almost been won by the unaided efforts of the Knights. On August 23 came yet another grand assault, the last serious effort, as it proved, of the besiegers; it was thrown back with the greatest difficulty, even the wounded taking part in the defence. The plight of the Turkish forces, however, was now desperate. With the exception of St. Elmo, the fortifications were still intact. By working night and day the garrison had repaired the breaches, and the capture of Malta seemed more and more impossible. Those terrible summer months with the burning sirocco had laid many of the troops low with sickness in their crowded quarters; ammunition and food were beginning to run short, and the troops were becoming more and more dispirited at the failure of their numerous attacks and the unending toll of lives. The death of Dragut, on June 23, had proved an incalculable loss, and the jealousy between Mustapha and Piali prevented their co-operation. The whole course of the siege had been marked by a feverish haste and a fear of interruption, which showed itself in ill-drawn plans. Dragut himself, early in the siege, had pointed out the necessity of more foresight, but his warnings went unheeded. The Turkish commanders took few

precautions, and, though they had a huge fleet, they never used it with any effect except on one solitary occasion. They neglected their communications with the African coast and made no attempt to watch and intercept Sicilian reinforcements.

On September 1 Mustapha made his last effort, but all his threats and cajoleries had but little effect on his dispirited troops, who refused any longer to believe in the possibility of capturing those terrible fortresses. The feebleness of the attack was a great encouragement to the besieged, who now began to see hopes of deliverance. Mustapha's perplexity and indecision were cut short by the news of the arrival of Sicilian reinforcements in Melleha Bay. Hastily evacuating his trenches, he embarked his army; but, on learning that the new troops numbered but some 8,000, was overcome by shame and put ashore to fight the reinforcements. It was all in vain, however, for his troops would not stand the fierce charge of the new-comers, and, helped by the determination of his rearguard, safely re-embarked and sailed away on September 3.

At the moment of departure the Order had left 600 men capable of bearing arms, but the losses of the Ottomans had been yet more fearful. The most reliable estimate puts the number of the Turkish army at its height at some 40,000 men, of which but 15,000 returned to Constantinople. It was a most inglorious ending to the reign of

Solyman the Magnificent.

[Footnote 1: A reminiscence of the Syrian days of the Order.]

[Footnote 2: The name given to the different estates of the Hospitallers scattered throughout Europe: they were so called because they were each in charge of a "commander," sometimes also named a "preceptor," from his duty of receiving and training novices.]

[Footnote 3: Most historians make this event part of the attack of August 18. But Prescott (_Philip II_, vol. ii., p. 428) points out that Balbi, who is undoubtedly the best authority for the siege as he was one of the garrison, places it on August 7.]

CHAPTER III

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN

Before proceeding to trace the history of the last two centuries of the Knights at Malta it will perhaps be advisable to examine the organisation of an Order which was the greatest and most long-lived of all the medieval Orders of Chivalry. The siege of 1565 was its last great struggle with its mortal foe; after that there is but little left for the historian but to trace its gradual decadence and fall. And, as might be expected in a decadent society, though

outwardly
the constitution changed but little in the last two
centuries, yet
gradually the Statutes of the Order and the actual facts
became more
and more divergent.

There were three classes of members in the Hospitallers,
who were
primarily distinguished from each other by their birth, and
who were
allotted different functions in the Order. The Knights of
Justice[1]
were the highest class of the three and were the only
Knights
qualified for the Order's highest distinctions. Each langue
had its
own regulations for admitting members, and all alike
exercised severe
discrimination. Various kinds of evidence were necessary
to prove the
pure and noble descent of the candidate. The German
was the strictest
and most exacting of the langues, demanding proof of
sixteen quarters
of nobility and refusing to accept the natural sons of
Kings into the
ranks of its Knights. Italy was the most lenient, since
banking and
trade were admitted as no stain on nobility, while most of
the other
langues insisted on military nobility only.

The chaplains, who formed the second class of the
Order, were required
to be of honest birth and born in wedlock of families that
were
neither slaves nor engaged in base or mechanical trades.
The
same regulations were in force for the third class--that of
servants-at-arms, who served under the Knights both on
land and sea.
As the military character of the Order became less and
less marked

in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these servants-at-arms became fewer and fewer, but in earlier days they were of considerable importance. The chaplains performed their duties at the Convent or on the galleys; the priests at the various commanderies throughout Europe were a class apart, known as Priests of Obedience, and never came to Malta, but resided permanently in their respective countries. A number of commanderies was allotted to the two inferior classes.

The Order, as we know, was an international one, and for purposes of administration was divided into sections or langues. In the sixteenth century there were eight of these divisions, which, in order of seniority, were Provence, Auvergne, France, Italy, Aragon, England, Germany, and Castile. When Henry VIII. suppressed the English langue in 1540, the Knights, with a reluctance to face the facts which was characteristic of a proud Order of Chivalry, kept up the fiction of its existence. In 1782, when the Elector of Bavaria secured the establishment of a Bavarian langue, it was united to the dormant langue of England and named the Anglo-Bavarian.

Each langue had its own quarters at the Convent known as the "Auberge," presided over by a "conventual bailiff," who in all matters was the head of the langue. Each conventual bailiff had an important office in the hierarchy of the Order which was permanently appurtenant to the headship of that langue. Thus the conventual bailiff of the

langue of France was always the Grand Hospitaller in charge of the Hospital of the Order, while that of England was Turcopolier, or commander of the light cavalry--a survival from the Syrian days. The possessions of each langue in its native land were divided into grand priories and bailiwicks. Thus England, which meant the possessions throughout the British Isles, was divided into the Grand Priory of England at Clerkenwell, the Grand Priory of Ireland at Kilmainham, and the Bailiwick of the Eagle, which was situated near Lincoln and had originally belonged to the Templars. These Grand Priors and Bailiffs of each langue, as well as its conventual bailiff, were all Knights Grand Cross, and, as such, entitled to seats in the Chapter-General of the Order.

The supreme control of the Order was vested in the Chapter-General, consisting of all the Knights Grand Cross. Though these Chapters-General were often convened in the early history of the Order, their difficulty of assembly and their clumsy method of procedure made them less and less frequently summoned, as the Grand Master had it in his power to convoke it when he pleased, though an interval of five years--later extended to ten--had been sanctioned by custom. In the seventeenth century the institution fell into utter disuse, and there was no meeting of the Chapter-General from 1631 to 1776, when its uselessness was finally demonstrated.

When the Chapter-General was not sitting the

government of the Order
was carried on by the Grand Master and the Councils,
known as the
Ordinary, Complete, Secret, and Criminal. The Ordinary
Council
consisted of the Grand Master, the conventual bailiffs,
together with
any Grand Cross residing at the Convent. This Council,
as its name
indicates, transacted the ordinary business of
government, which
mainly consisted of appointing to these offices and
making those
arrangements which were not definitely assigned to the
Grand Master
himself. The Secret and Criminal Councils, respectively,
dealt with
foreign affairs and offences against the Statutes, while
the Complete,
consisting of the Ordinary Council with the addition of two
Knights
from each langue of more than five years' residence at
the Convent,
dealt with appeals from the other Councils. In the later
days of the
Order the pernicious practice of appealing to the Pope
destroyed all
semblance of authority in this Council.

The election of the Grand Master was an exceedingly
complicated
affair, the intention being to prevent intrigue. Each langue
solemnly
elected three Knights to represent it, and this body of
twenty-four
chose a triumvirate, which consisted of a Knight, a
chaplain, and a
servant-at-arms. These three co-opted a fourth, and the
four a fifth,
and so on, till the number of sixteen was reached, and
this body of
sixteen elected the Grand Master. Every stage of the
proceedings
was hedged about with meticulous precautions to

prevent intrigue and
corruption, and it was a thoroughly typical medieval
attempt to secure
an honest election.

The framers of the Order's Statutes had taken the
precaution of
limiting the authority of the Grand Master by a minute
enumeration
of all his rights. But, as the Order developed into a purely
military
body, even officially his powers became greater. No
subject for
discussion could be introduced at the Councils except by
himself; he
had a double vote, and, in case of an equal division, a
casting vote
also; he had the right of nomination to many
administrative posts
besides all those of his own household, and in each
priory there was
a commandery in his own gift whose revenues went to
himself. But even
such wide powers were less than the reality. While the
Order was at
Rhodes, and during the first half-century at Malta, it was
obviously
necessary that the Grand Master should possess the
powers of a
commander-in-chief. As a purely military body,
surrounded by powerful
foes, the Order was in the position of an army encamped
in enemy
territory. Further, the absolute possession of Rhodes,
and later
of Malta, tended to give the Grand Masters the rank of
independent
Sovereigns, and the outside world regarded them as
territorial
potentates rather than as heads of an Order of
aristocratic Knights.

But when the Order's existence was no longer
threatened the Grand

Master's position was assailed from many sides. No one, while reading the history of the Knights, can fail to be impressed by the numerous disturbances among them during the last 200 years of the Order. Drawn from the highest ranks of the nobility, young, rich, and with very little to occupy their time (except when on their "caravans"), the Knights were perpetually quarrelling among themselves or defying the constituted authorities of the Order.

Charles V. had insisted on keeping in his own hands the nomination of the bishopric of Malta, and the custom grew up that the Bishop of Malta and the Prior of St. John--the two most important ecclesiastics in the Order--should be chosen from the chaplains who were natives of the island. This was intended as a compensation for an injury which had been inflicted on the Maltese. To prevent the Grand Mastership falling into the hands of a native, the Maltese members of the Order were unable to vote at the election. The Bishop was often engaged in quarrels with the Grand Master, and the disputes were generally carried to the Pope, who, as the Head of Christendom, was regarded as having supremacy over all Religious Orders. But the Pope himself often encroached upon the rights of the Order, not only by sending nuncios to Malta with large and undefined powers, but by arrogating to himself the patronage of the langue of Italy when he wished to bestow gifts upon his relatives and friends. This led to bitter resentment among

the Italian Knights, who saw all the lucrative posts of their
langue
given away to strangers. The introduction of the
Inquisition in 1574
and the Jesuits in 1592, brought additional disputes
about the chief
authority in the island, and these different ecclesiastical
personages
had no hesitation in interfering in matters which should
have been
entirely beyond their province. Many a Grand Master of
the seventeenth
and eighteenth centuries had his time occupied in efforts
to assert
his authority.

The Grand Mastership was also weakened by the
practice of electing
very old men to the post, as the short tenure of the office
and
the feebleness of its holder meant a lax control over the
turbulent
Knights. This practice became very common in the last
two centuries
of the Order's existence. But many of the Grand Masters,
though over
seventy at the time of election, disappointed expectation
by living
till eighty or even ninety.

We possess detailed accounts of the financial system of
the Order in
the work of two Knights, Boisgelin and Boisredon de
Ransijat, accounts
which agree almost entirely.

The average revenue of the Order before the French
Revolution was
£136,000 per annum--i.e., the revenue which definitely
reached Malta.
It is to be remembered that this sum only represented the
residue
which was sent to the _chef-lieu_. The Knights
possessed over

600 estates throughout Europe, each of which, besides sending contributions to Malta, maintained several members of the Order, gave a liberal income to its commander, and contributed towards the revenues of the Grand Priory in which it was situated. The chief items of the above sum were:

1. RESPONSIONS.

A proportion of the net income of each commandery fixed by the Chapter-General and liable to increase in case of need--£547,520 per annum.

2. MORTUARY AND VACANCY.

On the death of a commander all the net revenues from the day of his death to the following May 1 went to the Treasury: this was the MORTUARY; the whole revenue of the succeeding year was also sent to Malta: this was called the VACANCY--£521,470 per annum.

3. PASSAGES.

These were sums paid for admission into the Order, and were especially heavy for those who wished to enter the Order at an age earlier than that laid down in the Statutes--£520,324 per annum.

4. SPOILS.

These were the effects of deceased Knights, who were only allowed to dispose of one-fifth of their property by will, the remainder going to the Treasury--£524,755.

These made up about five-sixths of the total revenue, the remainder being small sums accruing from various sources, such as the proceeds from the timber of the commanderies (which went entirely to the Council), rents from buildings in Malta, and so forth.

At the height of their prosperity the Knights derived a very considerable revenue from their galleys, and just as Algiers, Tunis, or Tripoli thrived on piracy, even so the wealth of the East contributed largely to the splendour of Malta. But during the seventeenth century various Christian Powers, such as Venice or France, insisted on restricting the Knights' claims to unlimited seizure of infidel vessels and infidel property on board ship. As early as 1582 the Pope had forbidden the Order to seize in a Christian harbour Turkish ships or Turkish property on Christian ships, and, despite the strenuous opposition of the Knights, enforced his commands.

The expenditure of the Order was, on the whole, within the limits of its revenue. The chief charge upon the expenditure was the fighting forces--the fleet and the garrisons--which together absorbed about half the revenue. Of the other items, the most important were the Hospital, the Churches of the Order, and the support of its officers both at the Convent and in the various European countries. The Knights were never seriously threatened financially till the French

Revolution
wiped out half their revenues at one fell swoop.
Emergencies were
always successfully met by an appeal to the self-denial of
the members
of the Order and the generosity of Europe.

The control of the revenues was in the hands of the
Chambre de Commun
Trésor, which consisted of eight officials, the most
important of whom
were the President, who was always the Grand
Commander (the conventual
bailiff of Provence, the senior langue of the Order), and
the
Secretary through whose hands all the revenues passed.

In each langue
certain specified towns were used as receiving
Treasuries, under
the control of receivers who paid the money direct to the
Central

Treasury; these towns numbered twenty-nine in all.

These receivers
obtained the revenues from each estate or commandery
within their
district. At first the Order had possessed one common
chest, but with
the growth of its possessions each Grand Prior was put
in control
of his Priory's revenues; this proving unsatisfactory, from
the

difficulty of exercising control over these powerful
Knights,
the finances of each estate were administered by the
commanders
themselves, who dealt directly with the receivers in their
area. They
paid their quota or "responsions" biennially, and were
subject to
inspection from their Grand Priors; commanderies were
rewards to aged
Knights, and good administration brought promotion to
richer estates.

The Criminal Council, which consisted of the Grand Master, the Bishop of Malta, the Prior of St. John, the conventual bailiffs, and any Grand Crosses present at the Convent, dealt with offences against the estates of the Order. The accused were brought in, the evidence taken, and the verdict declared. All evidence was verbal and no written testimony was accepted; each Knight, unless he could show good reason to the contrary, had to plead in person. Any English or German Knights, who knew only their own tongue and so had difficulty in being understood, were allowed advocates. The Order, by its Statutes, discouraged litigation to the utmost, desiring to promote concord and harmony among its members, and for that reason all legal procedure was made as simple and as summary as possible.

In such an exclusive and aristocratic Order there was naturally much jealousy of the power of its head. Facts gave the Grand Master a very strong position, but technically he was only *_primus inter pares_*. To make sure the Knights were not oppressed, they were always at liberty to disregard the Grand Master's or any superior's command and to appeal to a Court of Égard to prove that the given command was a violation of the Order's Statutes. The Court of Égard consisted of nine members, each langue choosing one from its own ranks, and the Grand Master appointing the President. Either disputant could object to any member of the Court, whereupon that member's langue chose a

substitute. After hearing the evidence, which was entirely oral, the Court discussed the case behind closed doors and came to a decision.

The litigants were called back, and if they agreed to accept the verdict the Court's decision was announced and was deemed final; if they refused to accept it, an appeal lay to another Court, called the

Renfort of the Égard, which was constituted by each langue electing another member, thus doubling the original number. The same procedure

was carried out as in the first Court, and if the litigants expressed

themselves still dissatisfied, a new Court was summoned, called the Renfort of the Renfort, which was formed by the election from each

langue of another member, thus making twenty-five with the President.

If their decision was not accepted a final Court of Appeal, called

the Bailiffs' Égard, was formed by the addition of the conventual

bailiffs, or, if absent, their lieutenants, and their decision was

final. This admirable Court of Equity existed almost unaltered right down to 1798.

The Hospital was a characteristic institution of the Order, and

deserves some mention. Originally the chief scene of their activities,

the Hospital was never forgotten by the Knights. Their first duty,

wherever they went, was always to build a Hospital to tend the sick,

and to the end every Knight at the Convent, in theory at least, went

to take his turn in attending at the Hospital for one day in the week.

The site of the Hospital, on the south-east side of Valetta,
has been
condemned by science as unhealthy, and it is very easy
with modern
knowledge to find many faults in its organisation.
Howard, in his
"Lazarettos in Europe," in 1786, gave a vivid description
of its
condition and exposed its defects. At that time, however,
the Hospital
was sharing the general decadence of the Order, and
discipline had
become very lax. But, even so, the Hospital was far
superior to most
other hospitals in Europe and still kept much of that
distinction it
had acquired in the great days of the Order. We must
remember that
hospital organisation is a very recent science, and it
would be unfair
to accuse the Knights of neglecting what had not yet
been discovered.
Their Hospital was one of the most famous in Europe,
and was used
by many from Sicily and Southern Italy as well as by the
natives of
Malta. It was open to all who wished to use it, and the
attendance of
patients from a distance proved that it supplied a need.
The hospital,
which had generally over 400 invalids, was maintained at
great cost to
the Order, and the regulations were drawn up with great
care, though
they reveal an amazing ignorance of some fundamental
laws of health.
Patients, for instance, who were members of the Order
received meals
twice as large as other patients.

[Footnote 1: So called because they were Knights "by
right" of noble
birth.]

CHAPTER IV

THE DECLINE

1565-1789.

The history of the Order of St. John after the siege of Malta in 1565 is a sad story of gradual and inevitable decay. The magnificent heroism of the Knights at the siege raised their fame throughout Europe to the highest pitch, and the siege was rightly regarded as one of the first decisive checks received by the Ottoman conquerors.

It is easy to imagine the anxious expectation of Europe in that summer of 1565, when the heretic Queen of England ordered prayers to be offered in the diocese of Salisbury for the safety of the Knights of St. John.

The Battle of Lepanto, six years later, despite its lack of immediate results, dissolved the spell which the invincibility of the Ottoman fleet had woven, and in the seventeenth century the Turkish Empire showed plainly that it had passed its meridian. Now that they were in a weakened condition, the Ottomans, though never fully regarded as a European Power, were more acceptable to the Christian States, most of whom followed the example of Francis I. and concluded commercial

agreements and treaties with the Porte. The Turk was no longer regarded as a being beyond human intercourse, and the Levant trade was too valuable to be ignored by France, England, or the Italian republics.

The Knights of Malta, with their attitude of truceless war against the infidel, were thus becoming more and more of an anachronism as time went on. They never concluded peace with the Sultan, and always regarded the possessions of the infidel as fair and lawful booty. It was obviously impossible for the Christian States trafficking in Turkish waters to allow such a theory to go unchallenged, and we therefore find the Order quarrelling with the Pope, Venice, England, and France, as to their rights of seizure of Turkish goods in Christian vessels or of Turkish vessels in Christian harbours. In 1582 this led to a dispute with Gregory XIII., and in 1666 with Louis XIV., and the Knights were forced to confine their attentions to Turkish vessels trading between Turkish ports. England was destined later to incur similar trouble with neutrals for a similar theory of international law.

Had the Knights wished, their unending warfare against the Mohammedan would have found a suitable enemy in the Barbary Corsairs, who were a plague to Europe right to the year 1816; but though we find many a struggle between Knight and Corsair in the seventeenth century, the

sloth and decadence that were mastering the Order
made it gradually
neglect its duty in that direction. Whatever energies they
had
were more profitably spent in the Levant; for the Knights,
in their
seafaring expeditions, became little more than Corsairs
themselves.
When it was necessary, as at the twenty-five years' siege
of Candia
(1644-1669), the Knights displayed once more that
magnificent heroism
that had made their name ring throughout the world. We
find through
the seventeenth century many a display of bravery, but
they became
more and more infrequent, till, in the eighteenth century,
the Order's
squadron was used for little else but show voyages to
different
Mediterranean ports. It was becoming too great a task
even to raid
Turkish merchantmen.

After the siege it was determined to move the _chef-lieu_
of the Order
from Il Borgo to Mount Sceberras, and on March 28,
1566, the building
of Valetta was commenced. It was originally intended to
bring the hill
down to a certain level and on the plateau thus
constructed to build
the city. The fear of another Turkish invasion, however,
did not allow
of the completion of this plan, with the result that Valetta
consists
of a long, narrow plateau with slopes descending to
Marso Muscetto on
one side and the Grand Harbour on the other. The
difficulty of moving
about in this hilly town is commemorated in Byron's lines:

Adieu, ye joys of La Valette,
Adieu, sirocco, sun, and sweat,

Adieu, ye cursed streets of stairs,
How surely he who mounts you swears.

Each Grand Master strove to enlarge and strengthen the town's fortifications, with the result that, in the eighteenth century, Valetta was recognised as one of the greatest fortresses in the world. The building and upkeep of these fortifications proved a great drain upon the resources of the Order, and served but little purpose, except that of ministering to the vanity of successive Grand Masters, who desired to leave behind them memorials of themselves by bestowing their name upon a new fort or outwork. The continual increase of security and strength did not serve to improve the daring of the Knights, but rather helped to engender a condition of sloth that was destined to prove fatal.

This period is marked by constant tumults among the members of the Order and by acts of defiance against the Grand Masters. Even in the days of its glory there had been much jealousy and friction between the different nationalities composing the Order. The three French langues of Provence, Auvergne, and France, by acting together, exercised a preponderant influence; they contributed half the revenues of the Order, and were generally able to secure their object against the opposition of the remaining Knights. The constant wars between Spain and France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries led to constant troubles at Malta, and the Grand Masters

throughout this period had great and increasing difficulty in preserving the Order's neutrality. Many Knights broke their Oath of Obedience by enlisting in the French and Spanish armies. When this was discovered, the offended King would make out that the Order had taken sides and would threaten it with his vengeance. As the Order possessed many estates in both kingdoms, the Grand Masters were in constant fear that these would be encroached upon if an excuse could be found to justify such an action. But Spain, while it possessed the kingdom of the Two Sicilies, possessed an even surer method of punishing the Order. Malta, despite all the care lavished upon it, has never been able to produce sufficient corn for its population, and for this reason imported food regularly from Sicily, where the Order had built granaries for storing the corn while awaiting transshipment. As soon as the Knights offended the King of Spain Malta was plunged into scarcity, and the unhappy natives had often to suffer heavily because the Grand Master was a Frenchman.

Another result of the wars of France and Spain was the frequent internal quarrels at Malta. As the feelings of the two nations towards each other were often embittered, it is not surprising to find that French and Spanish Knights would come to open blows in the streets of Valetta. The unhealthy life of those young a

nd idle aristocrats was conducive to turbulence, and the Grand Masters often adopted the policy of sending them to sea as soon as trouble was foreseen. The French were generally in the preponderance, as we can see from the great number of French Grand Masters; and the increasing greatness of the French monarchy in the seventeenth century was reflected at Malta.

The position of the Maltese became worse and worse as the Order declined. The natives, who had enjoyed a considerable measure of local autonomy under Spanish rule, had been very reluctant to submit to the Knights, and had protested to Charles V. against their surrender to the Order, as a violation of the promise given in 1428 by Alphonse of Sicily that Malta would never be separated from the Sicilian Crown. They knew that the Order would conduct itself in Malta as a garrison in a fortress, and that this would mean strict military control over the inhabitants. It was also probable that the Turks would again besiege the Knights, as they had done at Rhodes in 1480 and 1522, and the Maltese were strongly averse to being drawn into such danger.

During the residence of the Knights the native population of Valetta was considerably modified. Some of the Rhodians who had, in 1523, accompanied the Knights, came with them to Malta; mercenaries who fought for the Order sometimes stayed on in the island, and many in this new population were illegitimate children of the

Knights. For,
though the vow of chastity was insisted on to the end as
a condition
of entrance into the Order, in practice, by the eighteenth
century, it
had become entirely ineffective.

At first the Knights made but slight inroads on the
privileges of
the natives, curtailing them only so far as was necessary
for their
military security, and imposing but few taxes upon them.
As the island
grew rich with the wealth brought in by the raids of the
Knights, the
condition of the Maltese also improved, and while the
Order flourished
it was not an excessive burden to the natives. But when
the
Knights started upon their decline the condition of the
islanders
deteriorated. They had always suffered from the
occasional scarcity
due to the ill-humour of the Spanish King or the natural
failure of
the Sicilian harvest. But now the taxes became heavier
and heavier,
and the free services of the Maltese, either as labourers
in the
constant fortifying of Valetta, or as soldiers in the
garrison, or
as sailors in the fleet, were more and more rigorously
exacted. Many
natives lost their lives while fighting with the Order, and
from the
generous behaviour of Grand Masters to the native
women and
children, which we find mentioned in chronicles, we can
see there was
occasionally acute distress in the island.

In its degeneracy the Order treated the Maltese with
boundless
contempt, as might be expected from spoiled members

of the great
European aristocracies towards petty islanders. One of
the most
intolerable forms of the arrogance of the Knights during
their last
years at Malta was their disgusting behaviour towards
the womenfolk
of the natives; complaint was dangerous and futile. When
the British
captured the island in October, 1800, the mere proposal
to restore
the Order raised such a storm of protest from the Maltese
as to prove
conclusively to all how hated had been the domination of
the Knights.

The splendour of the Knights at the height of their
greatness can be
judged from the many magnificent buildings they
constructed in the
island. The Church of St. John in particular received such
careful and
lavish attention that it became one of the most splendid
churches in
Christendom, being especially famous for its wonderful
mosaic floor.
The "auberges" of the various langues were also built in
the most
magnificent manner, and the palace of the Grand Master
at Valetta was
a sumptuous building worthy of a king.

The decline of the Order brought with it a diminution of
respect
from the nations of Europe, and we read of constant and
increasing
interference from outside in the affairs of the Order. The
greatest
offender was the Pope, who had always enjoyed a
nominal headship over
the Order, and who had been kept at a distance with
difficulty even
while the Knights had been at Rhodes. The creation of a
bishopric at

Malta, the introduction of the Inquisition, and then of the Jesuits, had led to constant quarrels between the Knights and the ecclesiastics, and from these had arisen the evil practice of appeals to the Curia. In the seventeenth century the Popes regarded the valuable patronage of the langue of Italy as in their gift, and the Grand Masters were powerless to protect their defrauded Knights. The depths of the Order's humiliation were shown by the demand of Pope Urban XIII., in 1642, that the Order's galleys should help him fight the League of Italian Princes which had been formed to resist his invasion of Parma. Lascaris, the Grand Master, was unable to refuse, and for the first time the famous red galleys were seen arrayed against Christian neighbours.

The operations of the Knights in the seventeenth century were mainly carried out in alliance with the Venetians, who were the one Power who continued to resist the Turk at sea. They were still lords of the great island of Crete, which lay athwart the trade routes of the Levant, and only by its conquest would the Ottoman control of the Eastern Mediterranean be complete. In 1645 Ibrahim I. declared war on Venice and besieged Candia; but the attack was so remiss that success seemed impossible. The Knights of Malta threw themselves into the struggle on the side of the Venetians, feeling bound in honour to do so, as the refuge of Maltese galleys in Venetian harbours was the Turkish pretext for war. In 1656 Mocenigo, the Venetian

Admiral, with
the aid of the Knights, won a brilliant victory off the
Dardanelles,
capturing Lemnos and Tenedos. This imminent peril
brought Mohammed
Kiuprili to power as Grand Vizier, and the war was
thenceforward
conducted with great energy by the Turks. Year after
year volunteers
flocked to Candia to save the last Christian outpost in the
Levant,
but it was all fruitless, and in 1669 the island, with the
exception
of three ports, was surrendered to the Turks--their last
important
conquest in Europe, and the final term of their advance.

The seventeenth century saw the gradual displacement
of galleys in
favour of sailing ships. The long voyages across the
Atlantic and to
the East had given great impetus to the development of
the sailing
vessel; its increasing use, and the entrance of England
and Holland
into the Mediterranean, had shown the Powers of that
sea its
superiority over the galley; finally, slaves were becoming
more
difficult to obtain in sufficient quantities, while criminals
had
never been a satisfactory source of supply. The Knights
were slow in
changing the oar for the sail, and to the end kept a small
squadron of
galleys as well as men-of-war. When Napoleon captured
the island, in
1798, he found there two men-of-war, one frigate, and
four galleys.

The pride and the renown of the Order had always
demanded a salute
from the warships of other nations, and even the mighty
Louis XIV.

yielded this privilege to the little squadron. There is
extant an
interesting correspondence between Charles II. and the
Grand Master,
Nicholas Cottoner, on the subject of salutes. A squadron
of the
British Fleet, under Admiral Sir John Narborough, had
refused to
salute Valetta unless assured of a response from the
guns of the
fortress--a mark of respect that the Order was unwilling
to pay to the
British flag. The Grand Master had also ventured to
doubt Narborough's
rank as Admiral, but the affair was amicably settled to the
satisfaction of all.

Though the decline of the Order was obvious to Europe
throughout the
eighteenth century, and the value of such a fortress as
Malta to a
Mediterranean Power apparent to all, yet there is little
definite
proof of any desire to wrest the island from the Knights.
Of all the
nations round the Mediterranean, France alone could be
said not to be
in a state of decay; Venice, Genoa, and Turkey were
becoming more and
more feeble at sea, and there was little fear of an attack
on Malta
from any of them; and though Spain paid great attention
to her fleet
in the second part of the eighteenth century, there was
little reason
to fear her aggression. Britain was acquiring greater and
greater
interests in the Mediterranean, but most of her attentions
were
directed to Spain and France. While the Knights kept
their neutrality,
however decadent and feeble they might be, there was
little fear of
their being disturbed. Europe still respected the relics of

a glorious
past of six centuries of unceasing warfare against the
Moslem; but the
moment that past with its survivals became itself
anathema the Knights
and their organisation would collapse at once. The
French Revolution
meant death to the Knights of the Order of St. John as
well as to
other bodies of aristocrats.

CHAPTER V

THE FALL

1789-1798.

A wealthy Order of Knights drawn exclusively from the
ranks of
the nobility was sure to attract the attention of the French
revolutionaries. Its international character was a cause of
offence to
the strong French nationalism engendered during the
Revolution, while
its traces of monastic organisation helped to identify the
Knights
with the Church.

When Necker, in the financial distress of the autumn of
1789, appealed
for a voluntary contribution from all landowners, the
Order gave him a
third of the revenue of its French commanderies, and
later it pledged
its credit for 500,000 francs to the destitute Louis XVI., to
help him
in the flight that ended so disastrously at Varennes. This
last act
put it in definite opposition to the Revolution.

The Constituent Assembly declared the Order of St. John to be a foreign Power possessing property in France, and, as such, liable to all taxes to be levied on natives, and immediately afterwards a decree was passed declaring that any Frenchman belonging to an Order of Knighthood which demanded proofs of nobility from entrants could not be considered a French citizen. This was followed by the main attack on September 19, 1792, when all the property in France was declared confiscate and annexed to the French national domains. There was some mention of indemnification to the despoiled Knights, but as the necessary condition to a pension was residence in France--a dangerous course for a noble in 1793 and 1794--the scheme came to naught. The decree of September, 1792, was the death-blow to the Order, and its extinction was simply a matter of time. The course of the war and the constant French successes made their position even more perilous. Half the revenues had gone with the confiscation in France; but this was not all, for Bonaparte's Italian campaigns meant the loss of the Order's estates in Northern Italy, and the conquests of the French on the Rhine diminished the German possessions. With decreasing resources and dwindling numbers, the fortress of Malta could not long hold out if attacked, and the position of the Order was becoming desperate. De Rohan, the Grand Master, temporised and refused to declare war on France, but he seems to have helped the Spanish and English fleets by

allowing them to recruit at Malta, a privilege hitherto granted very sparingly by the Knights. But whatever the Grand Master's policy, no words or pretences could disguise the fact that the French Republic by its confiscation had assaulted the Order. It was only too probable that France would seize the first opportunity of attacking the Order in its own home and by this means increasing its power in the Mediterranean.

One gleam of light came to cheer the gloom at Malta. The third dismemberment of Poland had brought the Polish Priory into the hands of the Tsar Paul I. Among other eccentricities of that monarch was a passionate admiration for chivalry, which he displayed by changing the Polish into a Russian Priory, increasing its revenues to 300,000 florins, and incorporating it in the Anglo-Bavarian langue; he also assumed the title of "Protector of the Order of Malta."

In 1797, at Ancona, Napoleon had intercepted a message from the Tsar to the Grand Master containing this news. Plans for the capture of Malta took shape in Bonaparte's mind, and he sent a cousin of the French consul at Malta, Poussièlgue by name, to spy out the condition of the island, at the same time ordering Admiral Brueys, on his journey from Corfu to Toulon, to examine the situation of Malta. When the expedition to Egypt was decided upon, the capture of Malta formed part of the instructions to Napoleon.

Bonaparte, relying on the demoralisation of the island,
intended the
capture to be a swift piece of work, and Poussièlgue had
helped him
by winning over some natives and French Knights to his
side. The
Grand Master, Von Hompesch, seems to have been
utterly unnerved by the
bewildering problems before him, and the cowardice and
irresolution
he displayed were a disgrace to the traditions of the
Order. Speed was
essential to the French army, as discovery by Nelson
would be fatal
to Bonaparte's plans, but had Von Hompesch been an
utter traitor
the capitulation could not have been more sudden and
disgraceful and
beneficial to the enemy.

On June 6 the vanguard of the French appeared off the
island, and on
the 9th it was joined by the main fleet, the whole now
numbering about
450 sail, of which 14 were ships of the line and 30 were
frigates;
the Grand Master had about 300 Knights and 6,000 men,
chiefly
Maltese, under arms. Had this garrison been resolute
and united,
the fortifications of Valetta could have held the French for
a
considerable time. But the natives were divided, many
regarding
the French, despite their doubtful career of the last few
years, as
liberators from a detestable tyranny. Two-thirds of the
Knights
were French, and many of them had become infected
with republican
principles, though the French langues also contained the
fiercest
opponents to the invaders.

Bonaparte sent for permission for his fleet to enter the harbour for water and for his soldiers to land--a request which was tantamount to a demand for surrender. Von Hompesch sent back a conciliatory letter, saying that treaty obligations forbade the entrance of more than four vessels at a time. Napoleon thereupon threw off the mask, and during the night landed troops at seven different parts of the island. A slight resistance was encountered from a few detached forts, but by the evening of the 10th Valetta was closely invested. The mob was encouraged by hired emissaries to attack as traitors the Knights, who were really the most bitter enemies of the invaders. While Napoleon's agents were busy throughout the town, Von Hompesch sat motionless in his palace, and no subordinate commander would take the responsibility of firing on the besiegers. Finally, a party of citizens interviewed Von Hompesch and threatened to surrender the town if he refused to capitulate.

At this point a mutiny broke out in the garrison, and the Grand Master and his Council, seeing the hopelessness of the situation, sent for an armistice preliminary to surrender. The armistice was concluded on the 11th, and on the 12th Napoleon entered Valetta, full of amazement at the might of the fortress he had so easily captured. On the 12th the capitulation was drawn up, of which the main clauses were:

1. The Knights surrendered Malta and its

sovereignty to the French army.

2. The French Republic would try to secure to the Grand Master an equivalent principality and would meanwhile pay him an annual pension of 300,000 livres.

3. The French would use their influence with the different Powers assembled at Rastadt to allow the Knights who were their subjects to control the property of their respective langues.

4. French Knights were allowed to return to France.

5. French Knights in Malta were to receive a pension from the French Government of 700 livres per annum; if over sixty years old, 1,000 livres.

Such was the end of the Order at Malta. Napoleon treated the Knights and the Grand Master with extreme harshness. Most of them were required to leave within three days, and some even within twenty-four hours.

On June 18, Von Hompesch, taking with him the three most venerable relics of the Order--all that the conqueror allowed him from the treasures at Valetta--left for Trieste, whence he withdrew to Montpellier, dying there in obscurity in 1805. Most of the homeless Knights proceeded to Russia, where, on October 27, 1798, Paul I. was elected Grand Master, though Von Hompesch still held the post.

But on the Tsar's death in 1801 the Order lost the one man who might have been powerful enough to bring about a restoration,

and the
survival of some scattered relics could not conceal the
fact that
vanished for ever was the Order of the Hospital of St.
John of
Jerusalem.

APPENDIX I

SOVEREIGNTY OF THE ORDER

There can be no doubt whatever that, after 1530, the
Order was no
longer independent and sovereign, and that L'Isle Adam,
despite all
his efforts, had become a feudatory, though the service
demanded was
very slight. The Act of Donation of Malta put them
definitely into the
position of feudal vassals of Charles V. as King of the
two Sicilies.
This is plain to everyone who examines the Charter itself
(Vertot,
III., p. 494, or Codice Diplomatico, II., p. 194). The tenure
on
which the Knights held the island from the King of the
Sicilies may be
classed as a form of serjeanty--the annual payment of a
falcon being
the only feudal service demanded. There were other
conditions in the
Charter concerning the Bishop of Malta and the Grand
Admiral of the
Order, but they were not strictly feudal. The chroniclers of
the Order
were naturally reluctant to admit this, and as the feudal
tie was very
weak, they glossed it over. But the Sovereign of the
island, strictly
speaking, was the King of the two Sicilies, and the

Knights were never more than tenants. When the Order had been expelled by Napoleon we can see this universally admitted. While the fate of the island was in doubt--that is, before the preliminary peace between England and France in 1801--both natives and English regarded the King of Naples as lord of the island (Hardman, 111, 142. Foreign Office Records, Sicily, 11). When the Maltese wanted to be put under the protection of England, either temporarily or, later, permanently (Hardman, 185, 193, 204), they applied to the King of the Sicilies, as their lawful Sovereign, to grant their request. Events soon made Malta a question of great importance in the relations between France and England, and the renewal of war, in 1803, left Great Britain in _de facto_ possession of the island, until the treaty of May 30, 1814, gave England full right and sovereignty over Malta.

APPENDIX II

CONNECTION BETWEEN KNIGHTS OF MALTA AND THE MODERN ORDER OF ST. JOHN

During the Napoleonic wars the surviving Knights were too scattered and too helpless to be able to improve their condition. But from 1815 onwards we find various attempts of the Order to obtain from Europe another _chef-lieu_, and representatives of the Knights at the

Congress of Vienna (1815) and at the Congress of Verona (1822) tried in vain to persuade the Allies to grant them an island. The French Knights were by far the largest and most powerful section of the Order, and in 1814 they had established a capitular commission in which they vested plenary powers to treat on their behalf. During the various negotiations for a _chef-lieu_ the question of reviving the English langue was started, and the French Commission entered into communication with the Rev. Sir Robert Peat, Chaplain to King George IV., and other distinguished Englishmen. The outcome was the reconstitution of the English langue on January 24, 1831, with Sir Robert Peat as Grand Prior.

The English branch of the Order of St. John has devoted itself for the last ninety years to the succour of the sick and wounded, setting up cottage and convalescent hospitals, aiding the sick in other hospitals, and establishing ambulance litters in dangerous industrial centres, such as coal-mines and railway-stations, which at last developed into the St. John Ambulance Association, which rendered such magnificent service during the Great War. The German branch of the Order was the first to start ambulance work in the field in the Seven Weeks' War of 1866, work which was continued in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Since that date the mitigation of the sufferings of war has been a conspicuous part of the work of the Order of St. John,

and nowhere has the Order's magnificent spirit of
international
comradeship been more fully displayed.

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NOTE ON THE AUTHORITIES

For the Statutes of the Order we possess the Italian edition of 1567, two Latin editions of 1556 and 1588, and the collection at the end of Vertot's fourth volume, which is later and more complete. The Codice Diplomatico of Fr. Pauli is the only collection of Charters to my knowledge which covers practically the whole history of the Order: the magnificent Cartulaire of Delaville Le Roulx only covers the Syrian period in the Knights' history. Many valuable hints can be found in the Calendars of State Papers issued by the Record Office, but they fail us at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Of the various historians above mentioned, Bosio, for the period he covers, is by far the best and completest. Vertot only goes down to 1565: after the siege he treats the subject in a bare annalistic form.

Boisgelin, who was a Knight himself and wrote his history after his expulsion from Malta, is valuable for his elaborate excursus on the financial system of the Order. All three--who are our completest authorities--wrote from the point of view of the Order, and consequently are very unreliable in some matters. The treatment that the Maltese received from the Order is very inadequately dealt with, and none of them can seriously estimate the Mediterranean background to the history of the Knights, and especially their relations with the Barbary pirates. General Porter, whose history is the only English one at all worthy of mention, possesses the same faults.

Though his knowledge of the island is thorough, his ignorance of European history makes him neglect the importance of the external activities of the Knights, and he follows the Order's chroniclers too slavishly to claim authority as an independent investigator. Miège, who was a French Consul at Malta, is interesting as a bitter opponent of the Order and all its work; and he practically confines himself to the treatment of the Maltese at the hands of the Knights.

The best authority on sixteenth-century sea power in the Mediterranean is Admiral Jurien de la Gravière, while Commander Currey's book is very sound and interesting.

