

and greatly strengthened and restored the fortifications. Each Grand Master strove to outdo his predecessor by additional towers or bastions, which should be memorials of his care and munificence, at the same time serving important purposes of defence. They gradually brought under their rule all the neighbouring islands, and made themselves as renowned at sea, as they had previously been on land; their vessels swept the Mediterranean, and many sanguinary engagements took place with the infidel corsairs. They were chiefly from Barbary, and all the Christians captured by them were made slaves. Many of these were rescued by the Knights, who were generally victorious in these encounters, so that, at length, the black flag of the African pirates, was almost driven from the waters, while the city of Rhodes was greatly enriched by the commerce attracted to its harbour.

After the suppression of the Templars in 1312, the greater portion of their property was given to the Knights of Rhodes by the Pope; and this not only increased their wealth, but added largely to their power and influence, which soon swelled to its highest point. But luxury followed in its train; the ancient discipline became much impaired; the Preceptors of the wealthy Commanderies throughout Europe cared for little else than the quiet enjoyment of their possessions, and the Grand Masters themselves were frequently absent from the island for long periods. But the alarming increase of the Turkish power soon braced up again the relaxed energies of the Order. Mahomet II., after taking Constantinople and Negropont, appeared before Rhodes, and besieged it with a large army. The Knights, under their Grand Master, Peter D'Aubusson, defended themselves with the utmost bravery, and by their desperate valour succeeded in repulsing the Turks, who were compelled to raise the siege, but not until they had reduced the Knights to the greatest extremities.

The respite, however, was not of long duration. Sultan Solyman II., called the Magnificent, after a series of victories, terminating with the capture of Belgrade, formed a resolution that, cost what it might, Rhodes should be subdued. The following letters, addressed by him to the newly-elected Grand Master, De L'Isle Adam, with the replies, are truly characteristic and curious:

"Sultan Solyman, by the Grace of God, King of Kings, and Sovereign of Sovereigns, Mighty Emperor of Byzantium and Trebizond, Most Puissant King of Persia, Arabia, Syria, and Egypt, Supreme Lord of Europe and Asia, Prince of Mecca and Aleppo, and Dominator of the Universal Sea.

"To Philip Villiers De L'Isle Adam, Grand Master of the Isle of Rhodes: GREETING:—

"I congratulate thee on thy novel dignity, and on thy arrival in thy states. I desire that thou mayst reign happily, and yet more gloriously than thy predecessors. It depends but on thyself to share our benevolence. Profit, then, by our alliance; and, as our friend, be not thou the last to congratulate us on the conquests we have just made in Hungary, where we have made ourselves masters of the important City of Belgrade, after having put to the edge of our redoubtable sword all those who dared to resist us. From our camp this and of the Hegira this"