

for deeds of heroic daring, and the utmost bravery under the greatest disadvantages, they were unsurpassed, rendering this one of the most memorable sieges recorded in the annals of history.

The Grand Master, at this period, was John De La Valette, who was well fitted for the post of responsibility and peril. He procured reinforcements from the Viceroy of Sicily, and summoned all the Knights who were absent in Europe. A review of the forces showed about 600 Knights, exclusive of *freres servants*, and 8500 warriors, consisting of the soldiers of the galleys, foreign troops in the pay of the Order, and militia of the island. The siege lasted for five months, and its record is one continued tale of attack and repulse—each one more serious to the Knights than the preceding, yet causing enormous losses to the Turks. No outpost was surrendered until the last of its defenders had fallen, and host after host of the besiegers had perished under the arms of the Christian Knights. Finally, the Turks were compelled to retreat, leaving behind them all their artillery, and having lost no less than 30,000 men in the vain attempt to conquer Malta. On receiving the despatch informing him of so ignominious a failure, Solymán, it is said, tore his hair and trampled it on the ground, exclaiming that “his soldiers were only victorious under his own command;” and, to prevent the murmurs of his people, was reduced to publish a fictitious declaration, that his forces had been successful, and that the Knights had been entirely vanquished.

The defence of Malta resounded throughout Christendom, and raised to the highest pitch the glory of La Valette. Congratulations and presents poured in upon him from the different Princes of Europe; but he still devoted himself to his Knights, and to the work of restoring the fortifications. In 1566 he founded Valetta, but did not live to see its completion. He died in August, 1568; and was succeeded by Pierre De Monte, under whose superintendence Valetta was finished, and the residence of the Order transferred thither in 1571. Hostilities continued for a long period between the galleys of the Order and the Turkish marine and corsairs of Barbary, in which the Knights were generally victorious, and rendered good service to Christendom by keeping in check the infidels, at a period when, as yet, the naval forces of the great European powers were but imperfectly developed.

But, as the marine of France and England became more powerful, while the Turkish Empire, once so formidable, gradually sank into insignificance, the occupation of the Knights of Malta, as bearing the brunt of the attacks against the Christian religion, was gone. Secure in their impregnable bulwarks, and covered with the *prestige* of former exploits, they became rather a corporation of wealthy princes than a body of hardy warriors. In this altered condition of affairs, they applied themselves to the development of the resources of the island,