

Ballou Maturin Murray

The Story of Malta



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PREFACE

Perhaps the strongest recommendation for faithful books of travel lies in the fact that intelligent people consult the best maps while perusing them, and thus familiarize themselves with important facts in geography. Such books are especially advantageous to the young, too many of whom are inclined to neglect this all-important branch of education. Although Malta appears upon the map as a mere speck, on account of its superficial area being comparatively so diminutive, yet the patient reader who is not already familiar with its absorbing story will find herein a new field of historic and romantic interest, exceeding that which pertains to any other of the numerous Mediterranean islands. In all his experience as a traveler, the author has failed to discover any locality of similar dimensions which embraces so thrilling a history, or whose present aspect is more attractive and picturesque. Since the opening of the Suez Canal, it has become the maritime halfway house between Europe and Asia, which imparts to it vast commercial importance, and causes it to be visited by many people who, but for the force of circumstances, would probably never have

become conversant with its singularly beautiful surroundings, or its fascinating capital, the unique city of Valletta.

Specialists, students of antiquity, geologists, and lovers of the early development of art, together with many others, visit Malta to avail themselves of its rare old library; to view the mouldering monuments of a commercial people who lived here three thousand years ago; to examine the peculiar geological strata of the island; to study its quaint examples of statuary, tapestry, and paintings; to collect skeletons and bones of extinct races of animals, still to be found in its spacious caves and beneath the surface of the ground. The average tourist has not been attracted hither, and little realizes the pleasurable experiences which await the intelligent and observant visitor.

While preparing these pages for the press, the author has received a letter, written by an experienced traveler, from which he quotes as follows: "The reading of your book entitled 'Due North' promptly sent me to view the glories of the 'Midnight Sun,' at the North Cape. I thank you sincerely for the inspiration." Perhaps these pen-pictures of the Queen of the Mediterranean may influence others in a similar manner.

M. M. B.

CHAPTER I

Geographical Position of Malta. – A Pivotal Location. – Warden of the Great Inland Sea. – First Sight of the Group. – How to reach the Island. – Early Inhabitants. – Language of the People. – Phœnician Colonists. – Arabian Dynasty. – A Piratical Rendezvous. – Suez Canal. – Two Sorts of Travelers. – Gibraltar. – Harbor of Valletta. – A Place of Arms. – Various Bays of the Group. – Dimensions. – Extensive Commerce of the Port.

The island of Malta has been known by several significant appellations during the centuries in which it has claimed a place upon the pages of history. In our day it is often called the Queen of the Mediterranean, not only because of its commanding position, dominating, as it were, the coasts of Europe, Asia, and Africa, but also as possessing a degree of historical and present picturesqueness unsurpassed by any land between the Columns of Hercules and the coast of Asia Minor. To the north lie Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica; to the east are Greece, Turkey, and Syria; and to the southwest is the coast of Barbary; thus forming an amphitheatre of nations. Malta is therefore a pivotal location about which vast interests revolve. The loving, patriotic Maltese proudly call this shadeless island in the middle of the sea, *Fior del Mondo*, – "the flower of the world." Yet it must be confessed that the downright ignorance of these natives concerning the rest

of the globe is appalling. To the critical reader of history it is as much classic ground as Athens or Rome. Situated twenty-five hundred miles from England, the government fully realizes its importance as an effective base of naval and military operations, and as an essential outpost for keeping open the route to India. In fact, Malta is the strongest link in the chain which connects Great Britain with her possessions in the East.

During the Crimean war, it was made an English sanitarium for the sick and wounded who were invalided in that protracted struggle between the Western powers and Russia. We regarded it, after India, as one of the most important of the English dependencies. It is in no sense a colony, but is much more of a military focus than Gibraltar. Naval men consider Malta to be the warden of that great aqueous expanse, embracing nearly a million square miles, which separates the continent of Europe from the northern coast of Africa, the *Magnum Mare* of the Old World, – a sea whose memorable shores are thickly strewn with bays and cities, each one of which teems with historic and poetic interest. It is not the tranquil and lake-like expanse which it is popularly considered, but is capable of nearly as fierce commotion as the Atlantic. Another property usually but incorrectly attributed to the Mediterranean is that it is tideless, but it actually responds to the same lunar influence that affects the great waters of both hemispheres. The fact of its being so much warmer than the open ocean is probably owing in part to the absence of polar currents. The tide is most noticeable in the Gulf of Venice, where the rise

and fall is from three to four feet.

The author, while on a journey round the world, was coming from the East when he first sighted Malta. It was before daylight, early in the spring of the year. A ship's officer pointed out what appeared like a bright star on the horizon, but which soon proved to be the clear, far-reaching fortress-light of St. Elmo, "with strange, unearthly splendor in the glare." It seemed like the eye of a Cyclops peering through the darkness, as though one of Vulcan's workmen, fresh from the fiery furnace beneath Sicilian Ætna, not far away, had come forth to gaze upon the progress of the night.

In seeking to reach Malta from Boston or New York, the island would be approached from the opposite direction. After crossing the Atlantic to England, the most direct route is by the Peninsular and Oriental Steamship Line, by way of Marseilles. These vessels depart every alternate Thursday, and make the passage in eight days, touching at Gibraltar, forming, perhaps, the most economical route. If a land journey is preferred, the steamer can be taken at Naples, where the vessels of this line touch to receive and deliver the regular mails. This charming Italian city can be reached from London by way of Calais, Mont Cenis, and Turin. The island, however, is accessible from England and the continent by many different routes, as the fancy of the traveler may dictate.

So much in the way of introduction it seems proper to state for the information of the general reader.

Malta holds an important place in the records of history as far back as three thousand years ago, during which period the island has been constantly associated with heroic names and startling events, playing a prominent and tragic part in the mighty drama of the past. The transient visitor to the group, however well read, fails to remember its vivid story in detail, and to apply it intelligibly. He is too ardently stimulated by the unique surroundings, the strange mingling of races, the Oriental style of the architecture, the curious site of the capital, and the general glamour of local color impregnating everything, to pause for comparison or analysis. Like one sitting down to a table teeming with choice viands, he is at a loss where to begin to appease his voracious appetite. It is while engaged in quiet afterthought, when reviewing the experiences gained upon the spot, that the fullness of interest is aroused, as he turns to the quaint pages of many an ancient tome, to seek for the story of its earliest inhabitants. We can recall no other country which has experienced so many and such notable changes among its rulers, though it requires but little research to discover the paucity of detailed information concerning its early history, which is absolutely lost in the mist of ages.

Three thousand years – this is not looking backward very far, comparatively speaking. The author has seen objects of Egyptian production, in the Boolak Museum, on the banks of the Nile, which were six thousand years old. The Sphinx, standing in its grim loneliness ten miles from Cairo, is still older, while in the

South Sea Islands there are prehistoric ruins which are believed to antedate the Sphinx. The probability is that a degree of antiquity applies to this globe so inconceivably remote that, like stellar distances, the mind can hardly realize the truth. Professor Agassiz talked confidently in his day of a million years having been required to bring about the present conditions of the earth. Since Agassiz's time geologists and scientists generally do not hesitate to add the plural to million, guided by the light of modern progress and discovery.

Such ancient mention of Malta as does exist is crowded with fable, like the early history of Greece and Rome. An example of this is found in the popular legend of its having once been inhabited by a cyclopean tribe, a race of giants, "half human, half divine." These extravagant legends of poetic history impress us as having, perhaps, some foundation in truth. It is not falsehood which tradition seeks to perpetuate. Possibility, if not probability, is required of the wildest romancers. Truth and fable run in nearly parallel lines. Jules Verne, when he wrote some of his seemingly extravagant stories, scarcely thought that he was simply anticipating possible circumstances which would so soon become realities. The reading world hardly believed that his "Round the World in Eighty Days" was strictly within the lines of truth; yet that record has been reduced.

Malta is known to have been the vassal of ten different nationalities. What the character of these various dynasties may have been can only be conjectured. There are no records extant

by which we can learn aught in detail concerning them. A few half-ruined monuments, a series of rock tombs, the débris of mouldering temples, or a nearly obliterated underground city, "rich with the spoils of time," – these are significant suggestions which the student of the past in vain essays to translate into coherency. The most casual visitor is moved to thoughtfulness as he contemplates these half-effaced tokens of a long dead and buried race, who had no Froissart to hand down their story through the lengthening vista of ages. First came the Phœnicians, who were here many centuries before the birth of Christ, and who were the earliest known colonists of Malta. Their sovereignty is believed to have extended through a period of seven hundred years. Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Goths, and Arabs succeeded each other in the order in which they are named, followed by German, Spanish, French, and English possessors, the latter having maintained an uninterrupted mastership since the beginning of the present century. To a nation whose naval supremacy is its greatest pride, and which already holds Gibraltar, the key to the Mediterranean, the holding of Malta is of inestimable importance. With these facts in view, it is not surprising that its security is so jealously guarded by England. Perhaps the boastful threat of the first Napoleon, that he would make of the Mediterranean a French lake, has not yet been forgotten. At present it is strictly an English dependency, though surrounded by a score of other nationalities. With the entrance and exit in her hands, besides holding this unequalled

central dépôt of arms, no nation could hope successfully to dispute the control of the Mediterranean with Great Britain. That nationality not only dominates the great marine highway of the south of Europe, but also the coast of Asia.

Malta is situated in the middle of the great highway of commerce between the East and the West, and is the most southerly land in Europe, on about the 36th parallel of north latitude, its longitude being 15° east. The neighboring nations have often and fiercely contested for the sovereignty of Malta, until its soil has been irrigated by the life-tide of human beings. How strange the history it presents to us, what ages of melodramatic vicissitudes, emphasized by the discord of warring cannon and of dying men! How many and how varied the changes it has known in a period of thrice ten hundred years! Mutability is written on all things human, while Time, the remorseless iconoclast, performs the bidding of Destiny.

It would naturally be expected that the language of a people who have had such a peculiar experience as the Maltese should be a conglomerate, formed from various Asiatic and European tongues. It seems to be a mixture of Italian and Arabic, mingled with the patois which is common in the Grecian Archipelago; but English being the current official language, it prevails among the educated classes, and is also in general use for business purposes, especially in the retail shops of Valletta, the capital. The language of Dante, Petrarch, and Ariosto is still unknown to the common people, though generally understood and spoken in society. The

masses adhere tenaciously to their native dialect, even after they have emigrated to other countries. In Gibraltar they pick up just enough of Spanish to make their wants known, as they do in other Mediterranean ports to which chance has brought them.

As is often the case in Eastern countries and oceanic islands, Malta is used both for the name of the island and that of the capital. The one collective term answers for the entire group; so with the beautiful island of Ceylon; people do not usually speak of Colombo, its capital, but of Ceylon, as designating the whole island. Martinique is sufficiently distinctive as regards that picturesque West Indian island; St. Pierre and Fort de France, the commercial and political capitals, are rarely mentioned. Thus Valletta has little significance to the world at large, while Malta is familiar enough.

The Phœnicians, the Greeks, and the Romans, each left tangible evidences of their sovereignty here. The ubiquitous Phœnicians, who are considered to have been the earliest of the commercial tribes, were by no means entirely free from the charge of piracy, which seems to have been almost universal upon this central sea in the earlier and middle ages. Strange, that sea-robbery should have been one of the active agencies in the world's advancement! It is said that all progress since the beginning has been from scaffold to scaffold. In our day no lapse from honorable commercial methods is so abhorrent to civilized nations, and no crimes are more severely punished. Next to the Turks and Algerines, the Greeks were the most

reprehensible in this respect, – a people whose love of "freedom" has become a proverb; a country which has enjoyed more of American sympathy and material aid than any other, but whose sons in former times never failed to adopt a corsair life when opportunity offered.

There are very few monuments relating to the occupancy of these islands by the Arabs, who were settled here for more than two centuries. The most durable memorial of that people is their language, a tongue unsurpassed in poetic beauty of expression. After the lapse of ten centuries it is still spoken among the natives, and is held to be remarkably pure, especially in Gozo, the sister isle of Malta. Though it is customary to say that the natives speak Arabic, still it can hardly be a pure tongue; and yet the newly arrived Arabs can understand the Maltese, proving that the basis of the two languages must be identical. An educated resident took occasion to prove to the author that here and there one could select words from the current speech of the common people, the derivation of which was clearly Phœnician. Residents of the capital who are engaged in commerce, and many others of intelligence, speak English, French, and Italian fluently, and most of them speak the native tongue as well. The facility for acquiring foreign languages is a national trait. Cultured Maltese are surpassed only in this respect by educated Russians.

Italian is the official tongue of the law courts, though English is gradually superseding it. Why the former language should be persisted in, it would be difficult to say, though it is the

key to all those common in the Levant. The Maltese are not Italians, and never were. Not to put too fine a point upon the matter, they are Arabs in their manners, customs, and language. When the Knights of St. John were sovereign here, nearly four hundred years ago, there was a certain degree of consistency in the adoption of Italian as the current or court language. The intimate relations of the order with the Pope and with Rome were a predisposing influence which could not but have its effect, besides which there was the close proximity of the mainland of Italy; but to continue it as the recognized language of the courts to-day is to sustain an anomaly.

More is known of the Arab dynasty than of any of its predecessors. As soon as this people had gained possession of Malta, they promptly exterminated the Greeks, putting all the male inhabitants to the sword, while making slaves of their wives and children. They were careful to conciliate the native population, even permitting them to worship after the dictates of their own religious convictions, which is a very rare concession among Mohammedans, where they have the power to do otherwise. The Arabs chiefly prized this group of islands for the safe harbors which it afforded in the pursuit of their one occupation, namely, that of undisguised piracy. Their constant raids upon the coast of Italy caused many expeditions to be fitted out from that country for the purpose of driving them away from their stronghold; but as we have said, the Arabs maintained their sovereignty here for over two hundred years.

Strong defensive works were erected by them on the present site of Fort St. Angelo, at the entrance of the harbor of Valletta, on the island of Gozo, and at the old capital of the group, Città Vecchia, also known as Cività Notabile, – "Illustrious City," which appellation, in the days of its glory, was probably not inappropriate. This old city, near the middle of the island, was a fortified metropolis centuries before the Arabs came, its defensive walls being contracted by them so that they might be the more easily manned and defended. To visit Città Vecchia to-day is like the realization of a mediæval dream.

A glance at the map will show the reader that the strategic importance of these Maltese islands is almost unequaled. Lying in the middle of the vast and famous inland sea, – happily designated as the cradle of civilization, – within a brief sail of three continents, sixty miles from the shore of Sicily, one hundred and ninety from the mainland of Italy, two hundred from the nearest point of Africa, and equidistant from Constantinople and Marseilles, Valletta has naturally become a popular port of call, as well as an important coaling station for many lines of steamships. This is particularly the case with those bound to or from England and India by way of the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. The opening of that famous and all-important waterway insured the lasting commercial prosperity of the Maltese group. From that day to the present its material growth has been steadily progressing and its population increasing. It is well known how much the Suez Canal promotes the commerce of Europe and

Asia, but comparatively few people realize that we have in America a similar means of transportation which is the avenue of a much larger marine traffic. We refer to the Sault Ste. Marie Canal, which connects the State of Michigan with the Canadian Province of Ontario. The aggregate of the tonnage which annually passes through the American artificial river is shown by government statistics to far exceed that of the great canal which connects the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

Malta is the halfway station, as it were, of the P. & O. line between London and Bombay; but there is other regular communication between the group and England, as well as mail steamships running to Marseilles, Alexandria, Belgium, Tripoli, and Tunis. Occasionally a single passenger or a small party of tourists stop at Valletta until the next packet touches here, enabling them to resume their journey east or west; but it is rather surprising how few visitors to Malta remain long enough to see one half of its many objects of interest, while others, who might easily do so, will not even take the trouble to land. One can sail half round the globe without finding a locality from which such a store of historic information and pleasurable memories can be brought away, or whose present aspect is more inviting. People who have no poetic sense or delicate appreciation will not find these qualities ready furnished for them, either at home or abroad. The dull, prosaic individual whose ideas run only in a practical groove, who lives purely in the commonplace, will be impressed by travel much after the fashion of the backwoodsman

from Maine, when he saw Niagara Falls for the first time.

"Great Scott!" said he, gazing approvingly upon the moving aqueous body, "what a waste of water-power!"

A somewhat similar scene, of which the author was a witness, is well remembered.

"Are you going on shore, madam, while we take in coal?" asked the captain of a P. & O. steamship, addressing one of his lady passengers, who was en route from India to England.

"Can I get me a dear little Maltese dog there for a pet?" asked the lady in response.

"It is doubtful," was the answer. "The animals you refer to are now very scarce in these islands."

"Then I think I'll remain on board," rejoined madam. "There's nothing on the island worth seeing, I believe."

"Some persons come thousands of miles solely to visit the place," was the captain's quiet reply. "Its history is very curious."

"Are there any palaces?"

"There are over half a hundred edifices so called, though they have nearly all been diverted from their original purpose by the present government."

"They have nice old lace here, I am told. But one can get the same thing in London, you know."

"Oh, yes, and perhaps you will be able to find a 'puppy' to your liking, in London," said the sarcastic captain.

"I think I'll be content with reading about the place," was the final response of the obtuse passenger.

As to Gibraltar, that gray old solitary rock lying about a thousand miles to the westward of the Maltese group, and looming to a height of fourteen hundred feet, it is a far less attractive place, though among passengers generally there seems to be a different opinion. Here travelers usually manage to make a break in their sea voyage, and to remain a couple of days or more to examine the dreary old fortress and garrison town. We say it is far less attractive than Malta: as regards its past or present, it bears no comparison to this group. With the exception of the old Moorish castle which overlooks the town, there is not a single edifice in Gibraltar with any pretension to architectural merit or antiquarian interest.

The Maltese dog, about which the lady passenger inquired, is a sort of spaniel with long, silky, slate-colored hair, which hangs down from its head and body, touching the ground. It has in the past been much esteemed by royal families as a lapdog, and is of a very ancient breed, being conspicuous upon old Roman monuments. It is spoken of by the historian Strabo, but it seems to have almost entirely disappeared in our time, as the captain remarked. We saw an indifferent specimen offered for sale in Valletta, for which ten pounds sterling was demanded.

The port of Valletta contains two marine docks, capable of receiving ships of the largest tonnage, and is resorted to by both naval and commercial shipping for needed repairs, while it is also the headquarters of the British Mediterranean war fleet. The aggregate tonnage of vessels entering and clearing is double that

of Gibraltar. As regards social life, and the usual associations of a commercial capital, Valletta is far and away in advance of the City of the Rock. One comes quickly to this conclusion upon comparing the commonplace Water-port Street of Gibraltar with the unique Strada Reale – "King Street" – of Valletta. The former is like a dull, narrow lane in an English seaport town, while the latter, full of life and color, resembles a picturesque boulevard in an Italian or French capital. Each is, however, above all else a place of arms; everything is and has ever been made subservient to this idea.

Malta is more distant from the mainland than any other Mediterranean island. It is less than twenty miles in length, not quite so large as the umbrageous Isle of Wight, on the coast of England, though it has nearly three times as many inhabitants. One often hears that garden of England compared with Malta, but wherefore, it is impossible to understand. It would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast than these two isolated places present. One, embowered in grand old trees and the rural accessories of a land which nature has delighted to clothe in verdure; the other, a solitary rock, a convulsive upheaval of the sea, reclaimed only by patient toil from utter sterility.

The various natural causes which have operated to reduce Malta to its present size and shape have been very thoroughly discussed by scientists, a majority of whom agree that it was once attached to the continent of Europe or of Africa. Our own humble opinion is that it was probably the connecting link

between them both, some time in the long, long ages which have passed, – a deduction which will seem more reasonable to the patient reader as we progress in our narrative.

The island is of an irregular oval form, having a superficial area of about one hundred square miles. The Malta of to-day is only a diminutive, sea-girt, limestone rock, cropping out of the watery depths to a height, at its culminating point, of between seven and eight hundred feet, partly covered with a thin though fertile soil. But its associations are of a character closely bordering upon romance, and intensely interesting for their antiquity and novelty. The highest point of the island is at Casal Dingli, on the south side, where, to be precise, the serrated ridge of the cliffs reaches an elevation of seven hundred and fifty feet above sea level. There is, however, no such average height maintained in any part of the group. The southern shore is of such a bold, inaccessible character as to require few, if any, fortifications to protect it from possible invasion by an enemy. It resembles for long reaches the rugged, precipitous coast of Norway, presenting a line of abrupt, repelling rocks, rising perpendicularly from out of the sea to an average height of two or three hundred feet. The face of these abrupt cliffs is accessible only to sea-birds and creeping reptiles.

The opposite or northern side of the island is quite different; being more shelving, and available for landing purposes. It presents numerous sheltered coves and good harbors for light draught vessels, together with a great variety of pleasing features

peculiar to seaside landscape. At the southeast end of Malta is the spacious bay and port of Marsa Scirocco. There is here a good depth of water, and the harbor is divided, somewhat like that of Valletta, by a promontory or tongue of land. There is a large fishing village at the head of the bay. Here the Turks landed an invading army, May 18, 1565, to begin the famous and sanguinary siege of that date. On June 10, 1798, the French under General Bonaparte disembarked their troops in the same bay. Northeast of this place, and half way to Valletta on the coast line, is the small inlet of Marsa Scala, which is only a shallow bay. The small Sicilian traders are accustomed to come hither in their light draught boats rather than to land at Valletta. Still following the northern shore beyond the admirable double harbor of the capital, we have the lesser bays of St. Julian, St. George, and Maddalena, besides the larger ones of St. Paul and Melleha.

Crossing the narrow Straits of Fregghi, we find on the north coast of Gozo the bays of Ramla and Marsa-el-Forno, while on the south side are those of Scilendi and Duejra. In this enumeration we have all the bays and harbors of any importance in the whole Maltese group. Landing on the southern side of either the larger or the lesser island is for the most part impracticable, precipitous cliffs rising sheer from the water's edge in Gozo, as we have described in Malta proper. On these cliffs incessant breakers chafe and foam upon the black, barren rocks even in calm weather. Standing on this lonely shore, there is a fascination in listening to the solemn moan of the restless sea,

in whose bosom there is so much of sadness, of direful secrets, and of unspent power. The trend of these islands, which form a very compact group, is nearly in a straight line from southeast to northwest. A bird's-eye view of the north side of the island of Malta affords glimpses of the blue sea penetrating the barren and yellow land for short distances, like Norwegian fjords, and supplying the absence of rivers and lakes as regards scenic effect, objects which the eye seeks for in vain throughout this rocky group.

Few islands, or, indeed, we may say few reaches of seacoast on the mainland, of similar dimensions, can show so many good and available harbors as are found on the north shore of Malta. Though the commercial necessities of the group have not yet caused them to be specially improved for shipping purposes, yet they will always be available. The admirable twin harbors of the capital have so far afforded all necessary facilities, but should the group improve as rapidly in business and population for the next few years as it has done during the last decade, another convenient harbor on the north coast will naturally become developed into a commercial dépôt, while the construction of a new and modern city will be sure to follow.

It is doubtful if there are many persons, even among those who are engaged in commerce, who realize the large amount of business which the government statistics already credit to the Maltese group, a commerce which is annually on the increase. The returns for the year 1891 show that the imports and exports

of Valletta are almost exactly the same in the aggregate values, each considerably exceeding twenty-two million pounds sterling.

The presentation of an important statistical fact will emphasize this statement. Over six hundred thousand tons of coal are annually imported for use and for exportation. The arrival and departure of ten large steamships is a fair daily average, supplemented by one or two sea-going private yachts. There are few days in the year that the echoes are not ruthlessly awakened by the interchange of salutes with newly arrived vessels of war. Altogether, the two harbors of the capital present a constantly varying scene of great maritime activity, while the town itself is a picture of gay and varied life, rivaling in this respect many a continental metropolis far more pretentious, and having thrice its population.

As the present possessors of the island of Malta, its story has doubtless a greater degree of interest for the English than for any other people. But as regards its relation to the history of the past, its importance is universal. When it was a Phœnician colony, so long ago, it was a powerful factor in the political calculations of the Christian powers; but above all other associations, the island will always be famous as the place where the glory of the chivalrous Knights of St. John reached its zenith, and where it also came to its ignominious end. Of this period the pages of history furnish a fair amount of truthful detail, but conjecture alone can fill the blank which precedes the arrival of this remarkable order at Malta.

CHAPTER II

Island of Hyperia. – Where St. Paul was Wrecked. – An Historical Bay. – Rock-Cut Tombs. – Curious and Unique Antiquities. – Sovereignty of the Knights of St. John. – An Anomalous Brotherhood. – Sailor-Monks. – Ancient Galleys. – A Famous Barbary Corsair. – Antique Norwegian Vessel. – Navy of the Knights. – Barbaric Warfare. – About the Maltese Nobility. – Romantic History. – "Arabian Nights." – Valletta the Beautiful.

Lovers of classic fable will remember that one of the islands of this group was named Hyperia by Homer, and was the supposed residence of the mystic nymph Calypso, where she entertained – not to say detained – the shipwrecked Ulysses by her siren fascinations, when he was on his way home from Troy. Her grotto, entirely shorn of its poetic adornment, is exhibited to the curious stranger at Gozo. It was while under the Phœnician dynasty that Calypso is supposed to have kept Ulysses prisoner for seven years. Such ingenious allegories impart a certain local and romantic interest, though they rather obscure than illumine history. Homer threw a glow of poetic fancy over the localities which he depicted, while Scott – to present a contrasting instance – gives us photographic delineations of the times and places to which he introduces us. In "Kenilworth," for instance, the novelist teaches the average reader more about the days of Queen

Elizabeth than a labored history of her reign would do, presenting it also in such a form as to fix it firmly upon the mind.

It would seem that fable, like history, is bound to repeat itself, since thousands of years subsequent to Ulysses' shipwreck here, another disaster of this sort, but of far greater import, took place upon the group.

According to Biblical record, St. Paul, when a prisoner, on his way from Jerusalem to Rome to plead his case before the Emperor Nero, about sixty years after the beginning of the Christian era, was wrecked in a rocky bay of Malta which still bears his name, —*La Baia di San Paolo*. It is situated seven or eight miles northwest from Valletta, and forms a broad inlet, the entrance to which is nearly two miles wide, running inland about three miles. It has some twenty fathoms of water at the entrance, gradually shoaling towards its upper extremity. Seaward, and near the mouth of the bay, is a small island. The shore is dominated by the Tower of St. Paul, a square stone structure erected February 10, 1610. The day indicated is the supposed anniversary of the wreck. Near the tower is a chapel, in which are some paintings and frescoes, which depict in a crude manner the catastrophe which occurred to the Apostle. A small fishing village exists here to-day, as in the time of the famous wreck. The creek just below the stone church is still the refuge for fishing-boats when the weather is stormy.

A dark, threatening, straggling ledge of rocks rises above the surface of the water some distance from the shore, over which

the restless sea breaks in fleecy clouds of spray. Upon this ledge, after being tempest-tossed for fourteen days and nights, the bark which bore St. Paul is supposed to have foundered.

"They ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmovable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves." On Selmoon Island, just referred to, there is a colossal statue of St. Paul, which was erected by the devout Maltese some fifty years ago. The popular reverence for the Apostle's name in this region is very general, bays, churches, streets, and chapels being designated by it, while in the inland villages may be found wayside shrines, small outdoor altars, and springs of delicious drinking-water, dedicated to this revered name. A grand annual festival takes place on February 10, commemorative of the shipwreck of the Apostle to the Gentiles, – Paul, the poor tent-maker of Tarsus. The church of San Paolo, Valletta, in the street of the same name, is the headquarters of this annual demonstration, which takes the form of processions, illuminations, and church ceremonials. This special style of public display is very dear to the average citizen of Malta.

It was a little over fourteen hundred years after the event of the wreck in St. Paul's Bay, which occurred about A. D. 60, that Malta was deeded by the Emperor Charles V. to the then homeless Knights of St. John, together with Gozo and Tripoli, a fact which will be more fully referred to as we progress with our story of the group.

There has been much ink wasted in controversy as to whether this was really the island and this the bay where St. Paul met with his maritime adventure, but it certainly seems to answer every necessary requirement, and has for several centuries been thus universally designated. The average visitor feels no doubt that he gazes upon the "certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship" (Acts xxvii. 39). A fresh northeaster was blowing as we viewed the scene, driving the waves in gallant style upon the ledge and shore, while at the same time filling the air with misty spray and rank sea-odors. The long line of milk-white combers, after expending their force upon the shore, rushed swiftly back, drawn by a mysterious undertow towards the deep waters. The noise of the vexed and boisterous element created a continuous roar, as the waves followed each other in endless succession. It was the *grégale*, the northeasterly blast so much dreaded by the fishermen, and which in the olden time, before navigation was better understood, created such havoc in this midland sea. It would have been difficult to effect a dry landing, even from a well-managed boat, with such a troubled sea running. One naturally remembered "a tempestuous wind called Euroclydon" which the Apostle encountered, while the imagination was busy in depicting the struggle of Paul and his companions to reach the shore on broken timbers of the ship.

The beach of St. Paul's Bay seems to be composed of the very smallest of sea-shells, together with some larger ones, which have

been mostly broken and powdered by the endless hammering of the waves. There is a fine sand, or something which represents it, probably composed of the powder from the shells. This place is a favorite resort of the people from Valletta for bathing purposes, but it was not an inviting day when we stood by the shore, and no bathers were seen. It was very natural for one to recall the Biblical words, "He maketh the deep to boil like a pot."

In this neighborhood there are numerous prehistoric rock-hewn tombs, cut by ingenious and skilled hands with effective tools. That these are Phœnician remains, there seems to be little if any doubt. Those aboriginal colonists were the commercial people of their time, who settled much earlier at Rhodes, and other islands of the Levant, than they did at Malta. They planted colonies in Sicily, Sardinia, and Spain. Carthage was founded by them. Malta afforded a convenient stopping-place between Carthage and the mother country, and was naturally prized on that account, having such ample harbors of refuge, and it doubtless afforded the means of repairing any damages which resulted from storms at sea.

Out of the rock-hewn tombs, of which we were speaking, interesting relics bearing Phœnician characters have been taken from time to time, such as vases and mural urns, together with articles of domestic use made from burnt clay, some of which are preserved in the Museum at Valletta. Other curiosities from the same source are to be seen in the private collections of English officials, and of wealthy Maltese. Years of research would not

exhaust the interest which the student of the past must feel in these antiquities. We know of no more fruitful theme or more promising field, for the historian and the archæologist, than is here presented. It is not an untried one, but it is very nearly inexhaustible, in pursuing which little expense and no hardship is necessarily encountered. Every facility is freely accorded, both by the resident population and by the government.

Some of the best examples of Phœnician inscriptions now to be seen in the British Museum were brought to light at Bighi, in these islands, where this ancient people worshiped Juno in a stately temple which stood on the spot now occupied by the moat of Fort St. Angelo. There are few parts of the world so varied in antiquarian interests as the islands of this group. Professor Sayce, the eminent Orientalist of Oxford, England, tells us that Malta contains Phœnician antiquities of a kind found nowhere else, and he pronounces the sanctuaries of the Giant's Tower, in Gozo, together with its companion ruin in the larger island, absolutely unique. These islands undoubtedly occupied an important position in the history of those remote days. The few Maltese who have written about this period dwell with great emphasis upon the glory of Malta while under Phœnician rule, though they are quite unable to give us any reliable details of the long ages in which this people held sovereignty here.

Within a few years some remains were unearthed which were attributed to the Goths, but of all the people who have been mentioned, they probably left fewer evidences of their presence

in Malta than did any other race. After becoming masters of Italy and Sicily, they came hither about A. D. 506, and held possession of the group for nearly forty years, until they were expelled by the army of Justinian under Belisarius.

The most romantic period of the ever-changing history of this group of islands, subjected first and last to the control of so many different nationalities, is undoubtedly that embraced in the two centuries and a half of the eventful sovereignty of the Knights of St. John, – Knights Hospitallers, as they were very properly called at first, the most famous order of mediæval chivalry, whose name is more familiar to us as Knights of Malta. The first convent of the founders at Jerusalem was dedicated to St. John; hence the original name of the order. It was the earliest systematized charity of the sort concerning which we have any authentic record. If the true history of this organization could be written, it would overshadow the most vivid romance. It began in Palestine during the darkness of the tenth century, when the Saracens were masters of Jerusalem, and it extends to the verge of the eighteenth. It is but the outline of important events, which live through the ages to reach us. The individual is sunk in the mass, and yet real history is but enlarged biography. The truth of this is shown in the life of La Vallette, as handed down through three centuries. His biography gives us a better history of the order of which he was Grand Master than do writers who attempt it by treating the brotherhood as a whole. Had the moral character of the Knights of St. John been equal to their dauntless courage,

the order would have formed a worthy example for all time; but their record shows them and their deeds to have been of mingled good and evil, the latter quality oftenest predominating. In the period when their material prosperity was at its height, they were equally celebrated for wealth, pomp, and vice. While they were boastful and claimed to be invincible, unlike most braggarts, they were undeniably brave. Nor was this by any means the only anomaly in the character of this singular and famous fraternity. Their career exemplified vice and self-abnegation, hospitality and piracy, the devoted care of the sick and the slaughter of their fellow-men, in about equal proportions. These clerical warriors presented a unique phase of human nature, the outgrowth of a period which, while demanding much sternness of character to cope with its exigencies, was also peculiarly amenable to the influence of religious superstition. The brotherhood owed a large degree of its influence to the cloak of sanctity which it so boldly assumed, but the humble spirit of which it so unhesitatingly and persistently outraged.

The attempt to unite two professions so remote in principles was like trying to make oil and water mingle.

The Grand Master, whose authority was absolute, was elected by the Knights from their own body, and held the office for life. In the choice of this individual, the order seemed to be almost always influenced by more than common wisdom, their election being guided by the best influences and wisest judgment. They realized the proper qualities which should characterize one

placed in this responsible position, and chose accordingly. They did not seek to elect such a leader as should favor this or that "language," this or that section of the fraternity, but one who was endowed with sufficient courage and conscientious piety to rule over them with impartiality. That there was an element of weakness ever present among them, emanating from the division into languages, is very true, and it was this influence which the Grand Master had always to guard against. National rivalry was inevitable, no matter how much the fraternity endeavored, as a body, to avoid it.

The Knights of St. John made the island of Malta the bulwark of Christendom against the advance of the pale, but bloodstained standard of the Turks. Even after settling here, which proved to be their final home, a bitter and murderous conflict was carried on by them with the Ottoman power, both on sea and land, but especially in their galleons, until at last, after triumphantly sustaining an unprecedented siege, during which they actually killed the enemy in the trenches, three times their own number, the Knights, with ranks seriously thinned, were left in undisputed possession of these islands. Victory not only crowned their sanguinary warfare with the Turks, but they also rid the Mediterranean, at least for a considerable period, of a much-dreaded scourge, which had so long hampered the commerce of these waters, namely, the rapacious Greek, Turkish, and Algerine pirates. In the armory of the Grand Palace at Valletta, there may be seen to-day, among other trophies taken

from the enemy by the Knights, the sword of the renowned pirate chief, known as Admiral Dragut, who was also Pasha of Tripoli. The owner of the sword was fatally wounded in the siege of Malta, before the walls of St. Elmo, in 1565.

This daring man, entirely wanting in the attribute of mercy, and known as the most reckless and successful corsair of his day, yet preserved some chivalrous instincts which were exhibited on occasion. A gallant saying, which is often attributed to others, was first uttered by him, if we may believe contemporary authority. It was at the time when the Turkish forces, with whom Dragut had joined in the attempt to take Malta, after struggling for months in the vain endeavor to capture the fort of St. Elmo, were engaged in the last decisive assault. The pirate, now advanced in years, lay sorely wounded and dying, when he asked the surgeon, who was by his side, "How goes the battle?" "Our soldiers have taken the fort and massacred its defenders," was the reply. "Allah be praised!" gasped the sinking corsair, "then I die content." These were his last words. Dragut was very humbly born, beginning his profession as a common seaman, at the lowest round of the ladder, that is, as cabin boy. His fortune was a strangely varied one, now a galley slave, now a soldier in the Sultan's service, now a pilot on the sea, and now a daring pirate, working his way upward by patient determination, until finally he stood as master upon the deck of his own galley, and was the terror of these seas. It was not long before he became admiral of the entire Turkish navy. Dragut had pursued his piratical and

warlike career for nearly half a century. He possessed executive qualities which fitted him to act both as an admiral and as a general, a large share of his victories having been achieved upon the land. He had agreed with the Sultan of Turkey to join forces with him in the attack upon Malta, but was delayed for a few days, so the Sultan's commander began the siege without him. Mustafa Pasha made a bad piece of business of it, and did not open his attack with true soldierly skill. When Dragut arrived, important changes were promptly made, and it was while directing these movements that the famous corsair received his death wound.

We have seen that the organization of St. John did not confine itself to warfare upon the land; many of the order were trained seamen, and were always ready to take the aggressive in marine enterprises when occasion offered. The strict vows of the brotherhood compelled the members to wage ceaseless warfare against the infidels. This was the most clearly defined and determined of their purposes, in the prosecution of which they adhered tenaciously to the last. In these sea fights their well-known courage, superior weapons, and persistency nearly always insured success. Their galleys, well equipped for that period, were held in readiness for service, moored in the land-locked creeks of Grand Harbor. These were efficient vessels for the immediate service they were designed to serve. They were over one hundred feet in length and twenty-five wide, being propelled by oars or sails, according to the wind. The sails were not designed for use unless the wind was aft, as the art of tacking

and sailing to windward was not then practiced. Fifty oars, that is, twenty-five on a side, was a common arrangement, and there were from three to six galley slaves at each oar, according to the size of the vessel. These men were chained in their places, and if they did not work to the satisfaction of the boatswain, the lash fell without mercy upon their bare backs. A galley was rigged with two masts, upon each of which a large square sail was hoisted. When the oars were in use, these sails were clewed up. Several cannon were fitted to each side, and one was designed to fire from the stern; but when in action, the usual plan was to ram the enemy's craft, and thus disable him, or, by boarding, to effect a capture in a hand-to-hand fight. The half-naked, half-starved slaves often dropped dead at the oars, and were ruthlessly cast into the sea. No more cruel punishment could be inflicted upon a criminal than to condemn him to the life of an oarsman in the galleys.

There is probably no more striking and significant example of the material progress of the times than that afforded by contrasting the iron-clad warship of to-day with a fighting caravel of the period of which we are speaking.

Contrary to what might reasonably be supposed, the people who lived upon the shores of the Mediterranean did not build vessels which were at all comparable in general excellence with those constructed by the Northmen at the same period. The galleons used by the Greeks, Turks, and Algerines, as well as by the Knights of St. John, were awkward and unwieldy; their

hulls represented no true lines of nautical beauty or usefulness. They were not seaworthy, as the term is usually applied. When the weather was severe, the vessel was always anchored under the lee of the nearest land, or was put into some sheltered bay. These vessels carried far too much top hamper, and exposed too much surface to the wind, to be safe when a storm raged. Their free board was enormous, compared with their draught. The author has seen at Christiania, in Sweden, the hull of an ancient war craft which was dug out of the clayey soil of the country, where it had been preserved for centuries, that antedated these galleons used by the Knights at Rhodes and at Malta, it having been built at least nine hundred years ago. Its lines and construction combined three important qualities, storage capacity, buoyancy, and speed, and it was intended to lie low in the water, thus presenting but small surface to a storm on the ocean. Not one of these characteristics could be claimed for the galleys of this inland sea. The latter were crude, top-heavy, with high-curved poop and stern, and designed only for fair weather service, while the northern-made craft could ride out the fiercest storm in safety when properly managed, and were built for open ocean navigation. In fact, this model, still to be seen at the Museum in Christiania, is such as bore the Northmen across the Atlantic to our shores, centuries before the time of Columbus, whose discoveries we commemorate. The naval branch of the Order of St. John was originated soon after their expulsion from Jerusalem, and was rapidly developed while they occupied the island of Rhodes, but it did not reach

its highest efficiency until after their settlement at Malta, where the situation of the island and its extraordinary harbor facilities particularly favored maritime enterprise. There they built many armed galleys, though all the material which entered into their construction was necessarily imported. There was no available wood to be found upon the island, except that which was brought from the mainland of Italy. A people entirely surrounded by water naturally came to be good boat and ship builders, and the galleons produced during the sovereignty of the Knights showed great improvement, and were famous for their staunch character compared with those of their neighbors. These vessels, however, would be considered nothing less than marine monstrosities in our day.

The galleys of the Knights did not remain long idle. When a restless spirit moved their owners, they promptly set sail for the coast of Barbary, where, surprising some unprotected settlement, they burned the place to the ground, enslaving those whose lives they spared. If there were any high officials among their prisoners, or persons of special importance, such were held for ransom. If the payment demanded for their release did not come promptly, they too became common slaves and worked with the rest at the trying galley oars. This service, if they were not in good health and strength, soon put an end to their lives. Such were the deeds of professed Christians, who, in their ignorant and bigoted zeal, actually seem to have thought themselves to be serving God by robbing, destroying, and enslaving those whom

they called infidels. In the light which comes to us through the long ages, we can see another and baser motive which must have actuated these monkish freebooters, namely, the desire for plunder and to kill, "an appetite which grows by what it feeds upon." Though they tempered their piratical career with deeds of chivalry and the outward forms of religious devotion, they were none the less blood-seeking corsairs. The red flag would have been more appropriate at the masthead of their vessels than the eight-pointed cross of St. John. The spirit which had originally given birth to the order – then well named Hospitallers – had long since been lost sight of. In Jerusalem, Turk and Pilgrim alike shared their hospitality, and their model was that of the Good Samaritan. Alas, for the degeneracy that followed!

The conflict as carried on for centuries by both the Christians and the Mohammedans was equally characterized by diabolical cruelty, while tinged by a spirit of blind fanaticism and religious frenzy. On the part of the Turks this was a genuine instinct, since they could not expect, even in the event of victory, to realize anything by way of remunerative plunder. In regard to the Knights, everything goes to show, as we have already declared, that religion was used as a convenient cloak to cover up their questionable purposes. The candid student of history will, however, honestly admit that there were many and striking exceptions to this rule. Some of the Grand Masters were undoubtedly sincere, though they were grossly bigoted. Of this, L'Isle Adam and La Vallette are striking examples.

Each fresh onslaught between the contending Christians and infidels led to increased bitterness and a desire for revenge. The terrible courage and indifference to death evinced by the followers of the crescent were more than matched by the cool, determined bravery of those who fought under the banner of the cross. Let the truth be frankly recorded. If the Turks were guilty of the most barbaric atrocities, and we very well know that they were, the Knights of St. John were not slow to retaliate in kind. History tells us that the latter, at the siege of Malta in 1565, not only decapitated their defenseless prisoners of war upon the ramparts of the forts, in full sight of the enemy, but afterwards fired their ghastly heads from mortars, and projected them by other means into the camp of the besieging army. Alas, for the brutality of warfare, ancient and modern! Who can forget that English officers professing to be Christians, during the unsuccessful attempt of the natives of India to regain their freedom, lashed their living prisoners of war to the cannon's mouth, and applying the match, blew them into eternity? This diabolical act, it should be remembered, was perpetrated not by irresponsible guerrillas, or lawless banditti, but by regular English army officers, in the nineteenth century. Wild African tribes, the Maoris of New Zealand, or the cannibals of Fiji could do no worse, while England poses as representing the highest degree of modern civilization and refinement. All war involves a greater or less lapse into barbarism. It was the first Napoleon who uttered the significant saying, born of his own experience,

"The worse the man, the better the soldier!"

But let us endeavor not to diverge too far from the immediate purpose of these pages.

We were speaking of the peculiar order of the Knights of St. John. The natives of Malta furnished no members to the ranks of the brotherhood. They might and did serve effectively as men at arms, and joined in defensive and offensive warfare as common soldiers. A certain exclusiveness was always maintained by the fraternity as to admitting individuals to full membership, it being realized from the outset that an indiscriminate policy in this respect would tend to belittle the order and weaken its influence, as well as to introduce an undesirable element into its ranks. Hundreds of the Maltese were paid auxiliaries of the different "languages" of the order, and others were volunteers in fighting for the sacredness of their homes when the Turks invaded the island. This they did in large numbers during the last memorable siege, but they were in no sense Knights of St. John. The order proper was exclusively composed of Europeans, who, before admission to the first rank of the brotherhood, were obliged to produce indisputable proofs of nobility of birth, to a degree which varied according to the custom of the nationality whence they came.

The Grand Masters created a certain rank of nobility among the Maltese, which was conferred upon individuals for extraordinary considerations, and for valuable services rendered in behalf of the order, but it is difficult to discover the advantage

of the titles thus bestowed. The persons thus complimented were not eligible for admission to the brotherhood, nor was any pecuniary compensation attached. Their descendants to-day, though they are quite impoverished, are more tenacious of these empty titles than ever before. The presumption founded thereon is simply ludicrous to an American. The French, during their brief sovereignty of the island, abolished by special edict all titles, but this amounted to nothing, and was soon forgotten. As these meaningless distinctions descend indiscriminately to all male members of the family whose progenitor was thus endowed, the prospect is that titled people will by and by become as plenty here as Maltese oranges, or the "Legion of Honor" in France.

Remembering the marvelous history of the Knights and their often tragic taking off, while we stroll through the palace-lined streets of the capital in the still hours of the night, when the moon throws pale, suggestive shadows across the squares and street corners presided over by effigies of saints, one can easily imagine the ghostly, armor-clad figure of a dead Knight, like Hamlet's father, revisiting its earthly haunts. If these defunct soldier-monks did not leave ghosts behind them, the power of such spirits after death must be effete. Every turn and each surrounding in Valletta, whether in the department of arms or of art, speaks of the vigorous doings of these many-sided knightly friars.

It was the Grand Master Jean de La Vallette, who founded the charming capital of Malta, after his murderous but successful

repulse of the infidels in their last attempt to capture the island. Though Vallette did not live long enough to see it reared to its present attractive completeness, still the stamp of his genius, as shown in the grandeur of its architecture, its palaces, churches, hospitals, and fortifications, is his most lasting and appropriate monument. So rapidly did the building of the new city progress after it was begun, that it is said to have been practically completed in six years. To accomplish this, hundreds of able mechanics and skilled artisans were brought from Italy and other parts of Europe. If these stones, whose surfaces three centuries have so wrinkled with age, could but speak, what interesting facts might be revealed by them to illumine this period of the world's history! We have famous telescopes which enable us to search out the characteristics of far-away Mars. Would we could turn one of these giant lenses upon the olden days in Malta, and obtain a tableau of its history with photographic fidelity!

CHAPTER III

The Maltese Group. – Comino. – Cave Life. – Verdant Gozo. – Isle of Filfla. – Curious Lizards. – Loss of an Ironclad. – Mysterious Wheel-Tracks. – Earthquakes. – Population. – Military Dépôt. – Youthful Soldiers. – Quarantine. – Arrival of the Knights. – Immorality. – Harbor Defenses. – Land Fortifications. – Charming Photographic View. – The Stars and Stripes Abroad. – The Eight-Pointed Maltese Cross. – Peculiar Sunset Scene.

We speak of Malta in the singular, which is the conventional form; official documents say Malta and its dependencies, it being the name which is also most commonly used to designate the capital; but it should be understood that the Maltese group consists of three considerable islands, namely, Malta, Gozo, and Comino. The latter lies midway in the channel which separates the other two. Comino is nearly circular, measures four miles across its surface, and contains some large and curious caves, also a fort which was built in 1618. There are a few huts in which the poor peasants reside, who labor on the soil, and send fabulous numbers of watermelons to Valletta. It would seem that this circumscribed bit of earth, or, more properly speaking, rock, breaking the surface of the Straits of Fregghi, was formerly considered to be of more importance than it is in our day. One ancient author mentions it under another name, that of

Hephæstia, which means the island of Vulcan. In the Middle Ages Comino was a very nest of Saracen pirates. Up to the beginning of the present century, the special advantage of the group for the promotion of illegitimate commerce has been its curse. Malta was the synonym of piracy from the earliest times, – a reputation which, as we have seen, the Knights of St. John did nothing to improve. Speaking in plain terms, they were the most pronounced and successful corsairs who ever sailed these waters, and were unmolested by the Western Powers because their piracy was conducted under the pretense of fighting only the infidels, and in behalf of Christianity. In our day we invade Central Africa under pretense of suppressing the slave trade; but in the days of this warlike order, its principal source of income was derived from the capture of Asiatics, whom the Knights sold into slavery, or retained in that condition.

There is said to be ample evidence that the numerous caves of Comino were formerly improved as domestic dwelling-places by the primitive inhabitants. Their partial inaccessibility probably caused them to be used as safe retreats when the group was invaded by a foreign enemy. Where natural caves existed in the early days of our race upon this earth, they were nearly always utilized as shelter for human beings, and doubtless artificial ones were created, it being the readiest mode of obtaining a domestic shelter. The Spanish gipsies of Granada follow this plan even to-day, on the banks of the swift-flowing Darro, not to speak in detail of the numerous cliff-dwellers of Behring Strait, where

Asia and America come so nearly together.

There is a cave between Comino and Cominetto, the entrance to which is accomplished by boat, not without considerable difficulty. When once within, however, and the eyes become accustomed to the gloom which pervades the place, the cave is found to open out into proportions of considerable magnitude. At the further extremity nature has formed a beautiful little gravelly beach, on which the lazy waves ebb and flow gracefully and softly. Geologists visit this cavern with much interest, as the sides teem with the remains of marine creatures which lived and died in the waters when these islands were gradually undergoing the process of formation. There are scores of smaller caves on Cominetto, and also on Comino. It was in the cavernous formations of the south side of the main island of the Maltese group that Dr. Adams found the interesting animal remains about which he has written so ably. These tokens of past ages, concerning which we have no other record, exist in nearly all parts of the globe. In the Ozark Mountains, near Galena, Missouri, is a cavern larger than the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky, which has been explored for thirty miles in a nearly straight line. In this Missouri cave, bones of prehistoric animals have also been found.

It may be said truthfully that there are few places which surpass Malta in antiquarian interest.

Gozo is about one fifth the size of the main island which gives the group its name. The circumference of the three islands

is a trifle less than one hundred miles. The shores, much worn and still wearing away by the ceaseless action of the waters, give evidence of having been considerably more extended at no distant period of time. Two uninhabited islets, besides Gozo and Malta proper, complete the list of the group; these are Cominetto and Filfla. The first, as its name indicates, nearly joins Comino; the latter, containing the ruins of an ancient stone church, is situated three or four miles from Malta on its southern side. It is a very small islet, being only six hundred yards in circumference. Filfla, from the Arabic word *filfel*, means a peppercorn, and the place is thus called on account of its diminutive size. The name of each inlet, headland, and reef along the coast is Arabic.

Besides the islands which we have cited, there are some small rocks, having sufficient soil upon them to afford a gleam of animal and vegetable life, but which are rarely if ever trodden by the foot of man. Sometimes the hardy fishermen spread their nets from the most available; but this work is generally pursued from boats and at points further from land. There are certain species of shell-fish, including the patella, lobsters, and crabs, which so abound on the circumscribed shore of anvil-shaped Filfla, that fishermen come hither regularly to obtain them. The phosphorescent jelly-fish, that glow-worm of the sea, lies upon the surface near the shore in shoals, with here and there a blue and rose-tinted starfish. The stormy petrel, the manx, and the white sea-gulls build their nests amid the rocks of Filfla. The gathering of coral was formerly a successful business

hereabouts, but it is now abandoned as not being sufficiently profitable. Oysters are also found near the shore, and form a considerable source of food supply for the common people; but the Mediterranean oyster does not recommend itself to one accustomed to the superior product in the same line found on the American coast. This bivalve of the narrow sea is often transported in considerable quantities inland to Rome, where it does not always prove harmless to strangers, though the digestive organs of the natives seem quite able to grapple with it. The author was once seriously poisoned by eating "oysters on the shell," at Nazzari's famous restaurant, near the corner of the Via Condotti, in Rome.

As regards this island of Filfla, it gives us a wealth in numbers and an astonishing variety of forms representing marine life, including sea anemones, sea urchins, and so on, together with some small shells almost as lovely as flowers. Men-of-war cruising in these waters use the island as a target, and fragments of shot and shell consequently abound upon its surface. Naturalists tell us of a peculiar species of lizard found on this islet, quite different from anything of the sort to be seen on the larger islands, "beautiful bronze-black creatures, quite tame, and much more agile than their brethren on the mainland." So off the harbor of Bombay, the author has seen on the island of Elephanta remarkable beetles, unlike any of the species to be found elsewhere. They are scarcely larger than one's little-finger nail, but nature has clothed them in harlequin attire, combining

golden, steel-blue, and pink. These tiny creatures have prominent eyes, like a King Charles spaniel, which seem to gaze at one with something like human intelligence. The question naturally suggests itself, where can a distinctive species of animal life have been derived and developed after this fashion, in these isolated spots? Is this the outcome of some not understood principle of evolution, beginning as vegetable, and developing into animal life? That the earth produces the former spontaneously we know, and that it may gradually, in the course of ages, become endowed with the latter has been declared possible by scientists. In our museums we see fossil organisms which exhibit in nearly consecutive order the slow evolution of both animals and plants. By this means palæontologists have been able to connect some of our present mammals, through intermediary forms, with their tertiary ancestors in primitive conditions.

Leaving the field of conjecture to scientists, let us resume the course of our Maltese story.

It is believed that at a comparatively modern date, geologically speaking, the islands of Malta and Gozo were joined together by the island of Comino. Deep wheel-ruts worn in the rocky surface on the opposite shores of the two nearest islands, visible even at some distance under the water, afford what is considered to be unmistakable evidence that the intervening straits have been formed recently, or that the sea was once so shallow here as to be easily fordable by wheeled vehicles. These wheel-tracks are particularly observable at Marfa, whence passengers take boat

for Gozo, but they are also found in other places, where the connection is wholly obliterated. On the edge of the shore, to the north of the Bay of Fom-er-Rich, wheel-ruts are to be seen terminating abruptly at the brink of a cliff one hundred feet high, which rises sheer from out of the sea. This shows clearly that some tremendous upheaval, subsidence, or both, must have taken place here within historic times.

Though the Straits of Fregghi are now many fathoms deep, navigation is somewhat intricate. A first-class British iron-clad was wrecked here in 1889, by striking upon a sunken rock. In very stormy weather communication between the islands is wholly cut off, but this rarely occurs. The shore in this vicinity is fringed by long, black, straggling ledges, the most dangerous portions of which are exposed only in stormy weather, when the dark, sea-worn rocks raise their heads and stoutly resist the onslaught of the waves, sending aloft transparent masses of white spray. When the sun escapes from the clouds and penetrates this watery ebullition, momentary rainbows bind the moistened atmosphere together with a lovely arch of prismatic hues.

Careful soundings show that the Maltese group stands upon a submarine plateau, which stretches entirely across the Mediterranean from Sicily to Africa, thus dividing the sea into two parts, known to geographers as the eastern and western basins.

Malta, so far as an unscientific person may speak, shows no signs of volcanic action, though there is a powerful agent of this

character so near in Sicily. At the present writing Ætna is in a condition of wild physical turmoil, forming new fissures near its summit, out of which the much-dreaded fiery lava is flowing rapidly, while the main crater is by no means idle. Nothing can stem the tide of these rushing rivers of molten rock, which have cut themselves fresh channels for miles, extending to the sea. The last outbreak occurred in the early part of 1865, continuing with more or less force for a period of three months. In 1669, one of these eruptions, besides costing hundreds of human lives, destroyed twenty-two towns and villages, on its mad course to the seaport of Catania, where the lava rushed into the Mediterranean in a stream eighteen hundred feet in width and forty feet in height! This extraordinary statement is in accordance with the local chronicles of the time. It was perhaps the most violent and destructive eruption of which we have any record; many have been slight and harmless. This latter fact accounts for the hardihood of the Sicilians in continuing to plant vineyards and farms within reach of this great subterranean furnace. So the people of Torre del Greco, at the foot of restless Vesuvius, ignore past experience, and all former outbreaks of the mountain which destroyed Pompeii.

In the absence of late and reliable statistics upon the subject, the present population of the Maltese group may be safely assumed as about a hundred and seventy-five thousand, of which number one half centre in and about Valletta. Borgo, Senglea, and Burmulo, on the opposite side of the harbor, eastward from

the capital, are populous suburbs of the city, and contain many well-built stone edifices, but none to compare with those of the city proper. These suburbs are the residence of an humbler class of the community than those who live in Valletta. The estimate which is given above as to the population of the group includes the English garrison, which seldom amounts to less than six thousand men. A brigade of infantry is always kept here upon a war footing, known as the "Indian Contingent." The whole number of troops at the present time, in and about the capital, is eight thousand of all arms. In case of another Indian mutiny, which would surely follow an invasion by Russia, England could draw at once from this source. The troops at Malta would be already half way toward their objective point, if ordered to Calcutta or Bombay.

Her Majesty's government also maintains an infantry regiment one thousand strong, whose ranks are filled by natives of the islands, a policy which is also adopted to a large extent in India, and more or less in all English dependencies. Even in Hong Kong, the large body of men who constitute the local police are Sikhs brought from India for this special service. They are tall, dark, fine-looking men, with heavy beards. The Maltese regiment just spoken of is a good-looking body of well-drilled men, though lacking the *esprit de corps* of English-born soldiers. This regiment is officered by Englishmen, and is called the Royal Maltese Fencibles, being mostly employed to man the outlying forts of the group.

We may be permitted a few words upon the subject of the garrison of Malta. One watches with special interest the soldiery of various nationalities. The author has seen the representatives of the English army in Egypt, China, Ceylon, Aden, and in all of the colonies of Great Britain except those of Africa. The men are, on an average, far too youthful for military service. Such boyish applicants would not pass examination for enlistment in our American army as we find enrolled in the English regiments here. Large numbers are under seventeen years. Even Lord Wolseley, in a late published report, admits this glaring defect of the British service. In round numbers, the English army consists of two hundred and ten thousand men of all arms, half of which number is kept at home, that is, in England, while over seventy thousand are stationed in India, and thirty-two thousand in various colonies. The empire of India is an expensive plaything, which the people of Great Britain support for the amusement of the Queen and the pride of the nation. The seventy thousand soldiers distributed over that widespread territory are hardly able to keep the natives in subjection. To maintain her grasp upon India, as we all know, has cost England rivers of blood and mountains of treasure, though she has no more legitimate right to possess the land than she has to Norway and Sweden.

Sweeping pestilence and frequent wars have not seemed to interfere materially with the rapid increase of the population of Malta. Visitations of the cholera and the plague have at different times created great havoc with human life in the group. So late

as 1813, thousands of the inhabitants fell victims to the much-dreaded plague, brought hither from the East, where the seeds of the scourge seem to be only slumbering when they are not bringing forth fatal fruit. The local records of the devastation of the plague in Malta are terribly forlorn, dreary, and saddening, and characterized by the calmness and dignity of despair. Since that experience, strict quarantine measures have been enforced, especially toward vessels coming from Egypt. Many travelers who have visited this group of islands have been obliged to pass a fortnight or more in the lazaretto before being permitted to land in the capital, while others, rather than submit to the trying discipline of quarantine, have given up their purpose of doing so.

Untraveled readers can hardly realize the discomforts and annoyances caused by quarantine laws, against the necessity of which no intelligent person will attempt to argue. Late experience upon our own coast, especially in New York harbor, proves not only their importance, but also their efficacy, though they sometimes, in individual cases, operate with seemingly unnecessary hardship. Sir Walter Scott, in describing his detention at the lazaretto in Malta, tells us of an accident which occurred, illustrating the rigid enforcement of quarantine rules. It seems that a foremast hand on board the ship which had brought him hither fell from the yardarm into the sea. The fellow struggled manfully, being a good swimmer. Several native boats, which were near at hand, promptly steered in another direction, but an English boat's crew, belonging to a ship in the harbor,

pulled as swiftly as possible towards the struggling seaman and rescued him from the water. For this act of humanity, the boat's crew was ordered into quarantine for a week. By saving the life of the sailor who had fallen from the ship which was in quarantine, they had run the risk of contamination!

On one occasion, while in South America, it was the author's misfortune to be at Rio Janeiro when the yellow fever was raging there. He was bound southward to Montevideo, but no ship going thither would receive passengers, lest the vessel should be quarantined. Passage was therefore taken northward to Bahia, Brazil, which was not a prohibited port, though yellow fever was found to exist there, also. Thence the Pacific Mail Steamship took us south again to the mouth of the Plate River, —*Rio de la Plata*, — passing, but not entering, the harbor of Rio. Thus one was compelled to travel by sea over two thousand miles for no possible purpose save to avoid being quarantined at Montevideo.

The cholera swept away several thousands of the Maltese in 1837, again in 1853, and once more so late as 1887. It will be observed that there exists a serious drawback in the location of the group. It is so situated, midway between the East and the West, as to be the victim of all such epidemics as are liable to be conveyed through the ordinary channels of commerce.

When the Knights of St. John first landed in Malta there were but twelve thousand inhabitants here. The Knights were soon followed by a considerable number of their former subjects in Rhodes, many of whom had, like themselves, been wanderers

since they were driven from that island by the Turks. The order was still popular and wealthy, enjoying a princely revenue from various continental sources, as well as from the rich prizes which they constantly captured from the Ottomans, from roving Greeks, and from Barbary pirates. The proceeds of these captures were expended with a lavish hand among the Maltese people, diffusing plenty and comfort throughout the islands. This material prosperity soon stimulated immigration from various Mediterranean ports, and called home many who had endeavored to improve their fortunes by seeking occupation elsewhere. The natives were treated with great liberality by their monkish rulers. No taxes were demanded of them, while they were in constant receipt of money from the plethoric treasury of the Knights. There was occupation for all, and fair remuneration for the same. Never before, as far as we know, had the sunshine of prosperity so smiled upon these isolated shores. The period to which we refer is regarded as the golden age of Maltese history. The most intelligent of the present inhabitants are never tired of referring to the period when the white cross of St. John floated proudly over the castle of St. Elmo.

It was indeed the golden age, speaking in a worldly sense, but not in a spiritual one; yet the average Maltese not only sympathizes with the profession of these Knights, but even indorses their daily lives, public and private, which would not bear for one moment the conventional test of our modern civilization. It would seem as though the virtue and honor

of Maltese wives and daughters counted for nothing, in this wholesale opinion of the period covered by the sovereignty of the order, and that the natives of that day ignored all sense of self-respect in their estimate of the value of pecuniary prosperity as compared with the sacredness of domestic purity. Women were bartered for like merchandise; personal attractions formed the criterion of their market value, while there was not even the pretense on the part of the Knights of keeping their priestly vows as celibates, by which every member of the fraternity of St. John was supposed to be bound. Women came voluntarily and openly from Italy, France, Spain, and England to trade upon their charms, added to whose number were those of their sex captured from the harems of the Mohammedans. Among the native women, little regard was paid to marital ties, and virtue among them was scarcely a recognized idea. We may be sure that the vile example set before them by those to whom they were taught to look up as their superiors was not without its evil influence. Lewdness is as contagious as typhus fever, and vice spreads like oil upon the water. We penetrate uncivilized countries and affiliate with barbaric tribes, who, following some strange instinct of the race, promptly adopt our vices, but are slow to imitate such of the virtues as we assume, if we have them not. It is not pleasant to dwell upon such a theme, but contemporary writers tell us that these islands became the scandal of Europe, and the popular resort of titled libertines, many of whom joined the Knights, who were then at the height

of their material prosperity.

Let us draw the curtain upon such matters, which have necessarily been considered, and turn to such as are more attractive. Of these we shall find a teeming abundance from which to choose in this *Fior del Mondo*.

The charmingly picturesque capital, Valletta, surrounded at all times by a quaint Oriental atmosphere, lies on the north shore of the island, at its nearest point to Sicily, upon a promontory extending a considerable distance into the bay. For the sake of completeness, its exact position is given: longitude $14^{\circ} 31'$; latitude $35^{\circ} 53'$ north. The port consists of two spacious land-locked bays, known as Quarantine Harbor and Grand Harbor. The entrance to both is commanded by the massive white battlements of Fort St. Elmo, supplemented by Fort Ricasoli on the one hand, and Fort Tigné on the other. Each of the three fortifications now bristles with threatening cannon of modern construction, — "the red-mouthed orators of war." The two harbors, forming a double port, are each subdivided into small bays, creeks, and indentures, which are well adapted to naval and commercial purposes, for which they are improved, all being embraced within the elaborate lines of the marine fortifications.

Grand Harbor contains the naval hospital, arsenal, dock-yard, and custom-house, with Fort St. Angelo inside and Fort Ricasoli at the entrance. Quarantine Harbor has at its mouth Fort Tigné, while within is Fort Mangel and Lazaretto Island. The landing designed for the mail steamships is also here. The lazaretto is

the most perfect of any arrangement of the kind in Europe. The tongue of land upon which the city stands is a narrow, rocky peninsula, dividing, as we have said, the two harbors, so that Fort Ricasoli at the entrance of Grand Harbor, Fort St. Elmo upon the point of the peninsula, and Fort Tigné at the mouth of Quarantine Harbor are all on a line at the sea front, and are capable of repelling the approach of any ship afloat. A bird's-eye view of the topography of the port of Valletta is at first a little confusing to a stranger, but its plan soon becomes clear, and the object of its arrangement is realized. It is then seen that the natural facilities have been admirably adapted to the general purpose by skilled engineers. We do not hesitate to say that there is not a more complete system of fortifications extant, in any part of the world, than the cordon of defensive structures at Malta. The forts of the harbor, however, form but a portion of the vast system of fortifications which completely surround Valletta. Such a gigantic amount of heavy stone-work as they represent could only be erected where the material was abundant and the labor cheap. The stone excavated in sinking the deep ditches was used in raising the escarps; and as to the necessary labor, that was done by the army of slaves retained on the island by the Knights. When they were not confined at the oars of the galleys, they were compelled to labor in erecting these elaborate defenses. Like the Egyptian builders of the Pyramids, the order was obliged to feed these workmen; but beyond that expense their services cost nothing.

While the Maltese capital bears, appropriately, the name of the Grand Master who originated and promoted its construction, these defensive works, so remarkable and so perfect in their character from a soldier's point of view, should perpetuate the name of Jerome Cassan, the accomplished engineer of the order, who designed them, and under whose able superintendence they were erected. No wonder they call forth the admiration of all military officers who visit the place. Immense sums of money and incalculable toil were lavished upon the undertaking, regardless of any probable necessity for the expenditure. So far as the science of military defense goes, it would seem as though perfection had been reached when Chevalier Cassan finished his original plans; but each new Grand Master of the Knights seems to have thought it to be his duty to increase the number of forts, giving to the addition his own name, by which each section thus constructed is still known. Exposed points on the coast of both Malta and Gozo were fortified from time to time, until there were no unprotected bays or inlets left. For centuries before this was done, piratical invasions were frequently made by small Algerine or Turkish expeditions landing at unfortified points. A score or two of armed men were able to ravage a whole district, and carry off half a hundred families to be sold into slavery. The Turkish and Algerine war fleets were almost entirely manned at the oars by captives thus secured.

When these soldier-priests first took possession of the islands, there was but one fort at Malta, namely, that of St. Angelo,

which hardly deserved to be called a fort. To-day, as we have shown, there is no unprotected point on the entire coast line of the group. Modern instruments of warfare have revolutionized the requirements of defensive works, and many of these elaborate structures, it must be admitted, are hardly appropriate to our times. Malta is the equal of Gibraltar in a military point of view, though the fortifications of neither are absolutely impregnable. Of the latter, it may be said that nature prepared the place for man's adaptation; but as regards the former, art alone has produced an unequaled amphitheatre of fortifications. On the land side Valletta is protected by a labyrinth of marvelous ditches and ramparts, many of which are cut out of the solid rock, besides having vast chambers, or caves, of the same substantial character, designed for the safe storage of grain in anticipation of the place being besieged. These rock-hewn caves are so arranged that they can be hermetically sealed. It is said that they will preserve grain in perfect condition for a score of years. A quantity of provisions is always kept stored in these receptacles for the use of the garrison, and to meet any sudden emergency, the same policy being adopted at Gibraltar and Aden. The warfare of our day, however, admits of no protracted sieges. Such a struggle as took place before Sebastopol, not very long ago, could not be sustained between two powers with the present means of destruction possessed by both parties. In the future, conflicts will be short and decisive. If anything relating to warfare can be merciful, the sharpest and shortest process is

most so. Lingered contests entail such terrible consequent ills that they bring with them sufferings paramount to those caused by the conflict of arms. "The next saddest thing in war to a defeat is a victory," said Wellington, as he looked sorrowfully upon the field which he had won by a fearful sacrifice of human life at San Sebastian.

The two excellent harbors of Valletta might afford anchorage for six hundred ships of war, as they have bold, well-defined shores, and an average depth of ten fathoms. This was not so originally, but is the result of a thorough system of dredging, which has been faithfully completed.

As we look upon the scene from an elevated point, beneath the afternoon sun, while freely inhaling the lotus-like air of the Mediterranean, everything is serene and lovely. Over the terraced roofs of Valletta rises the square tower of the Grand Palace, gay with many colored signal flags. Across the harbor the eye rests upon Fort Ricasoli, and here stands stout old St. Elmo, while in the distance Fort San Rocco crowns a hilltop. Much nearer is Fort St. Angelo, with its record of a thousand years and more. The numerous domes and towers of the city, though they are not minarets, have much the same Oriental effect upon the eye. Myriads of small boats, painted in bright, fanciful colors after the florid Maltese style, and having canvas coverings sheltering the stern, shoot hither and thither like birds upon the wing. The boatmen stand while rowing, as do the oarsmen of the Venetian gondolas, pushing, not pulling, at the

oars. Hundreds of small feluccas line the shore. A group of fishermen in rude but picturesque costumes are landing the product of their industry. Half a dozen ships belonging to the British navy, and as many huge mail steamers, swing lazily at anchor, while little erratic steam launches dart back and forth from ship to shore; a memorable picture, the sea and sky being its appropriate frame. French, German, Italian, and English flags indicate the nationality of the several vessels, but the eye searches in vain for the stars and stripes of our Union. The same absence of the American flag is only too observable throughout nearly all the ports of the Mediterranean and the far East. The home-keeping citizen who reads these lines can hardly realize the patriotic sensation mingled with dire homesickness which thrills the traveler, long absent from his native land, at sight of our beloved national emblem proudly expanding its folds upon a foreign shore.

We look in vain for one other significant flag, that of the eight-pointed cross, which for centuries waved over these battlements as the sacred banner of the Knights of St. John, the token of their religious faith and their resolve to conquer or to die, which led them in the van of battle at Jerusalem, at Acre, and at Rhodes, and under which they slaughtered the besieging enemy by thousands beneath the wall of Malta; the gallant flag which so often flashed defiance before the eyes of sanguinary Turks, treacherous Greeks, and rapacious Algerines upon the sea; the flag, alas! which was lowered in disgrace, in 1798, without the

firing of a single shot in its defense, to give place to the tricolor of France, and to acknowledge the mastership of Bonaparte. This was an act of cowardice equaled only by that of the arch-traitor Bazaine, who shamefully surrendered a whole army at Metz which was perfectly capable of winning a signal victory over the Germans, if it had been led against them by a brave general. The world knows how that dastard poltroon was tried and punished for his treason, as well as of his miserable subsequent life and unregretted death in a foreign land.

To return to the Knights of St. John. This act of treachery – the surrender of Valletta to the French – was virtually the end of the famous order; the dying hour, as it were, of a brotherhood which had for hundreds of years defied the whole Ottoman power almost single handed, and whose members, as chivalrous knights, won the respect of Christendom.

One often reads of the great beauty of the sunset as enjoyed upon this group, and we cheerfully bear witness to the fact that this phenomenon of nature is justly eulogized. Writers are apt to grow enthusiastic over Italian sunsets, especially along the Riviera; but the author, who has seen this diurnal exhibition in all parts of the globe, can truly say he has nowhere witnessed it surrounded by more beauty and grandeur of effect than in our own beloved land. Bostonians who possess an appreciative eye for the loveliness of cloud and sky effect, have seen at the closing of day, looking westward over the Charles River, as glorious exhibitions of the sunset hour as any part of the world can boast.

As to the beauty of the afterglow, the lingering twilight of New England, "whose mantle is the drapery of dreams," it can be excelled in no land in either hemisphere. In the enthusiasm of the moment, while on the Yellow Sea of China, the author gave precedence, in his published notes, to the remarkable sunsets which characterize that region; but in this soberer moment a calmer conviction is honestly recorded. Still, the quivering flame that seemed to burn like lava on the line where sky and ocean met, the iris hues softly reflected by the vapory tissue of clouds in the opposite expanse, and the gorgeous robes in which the on-coming night was wrapped that December evening upon the Yellow Sea, can never be forgotten by any one who witnessed it.

On the disappearance of the sun beneath the Mediterranean at Malta, as soon as the opal fires have burned out of the sky, light clouds usually fringe the horizon, emitting rapid flashes of lightning which continue for hours, recalling the Aurora Borealis as seen at Bodöe and Tromsöe, in Norway. There is no lasting twilight in this latitude. Night follows close upon the footsteps of the departing day. The brightness of the stars supervenes so quickly after the curtain falls upon the scene, and the mellow evening atmosphere is so clear, that the twilight is hardly missed by the watchful observer, as the Spirit of the night, upon dewy sandals, begins her course of the circling hours.

CHAPTER IV

The Soil of Malta. – Imports and Exports. – Absence of Trees. – Equable Climate. – Three Crops Annually. – Use of Fertilizers. – Ignorant and Pious Peasantry. – Food of the People. – Maltese Women. – Oriental Customs. – Roman Catholic Influence. – Improvisation. – Early Marriages. – A Resort for the Pope. – Low Wages. – Beggars. – Wind Storms. – Blood Oranges. – The Carob-Tree. – Maltese Lace. – Sailing along the Shore.

It has already been mentioned that a large portion of the island of Malta is covered with a thin, rich soil, some of which, it is said, was brought from Sicily at infinite cost and labor. If this is so, of which we have reasonable doubts, it was done only to a very limited extent. Vessels sailing hence with merchandise for the mainland or Sicily, having no return cargo, may have occasionally brought back as ballast quantities of earth, but that there was ever any systematic importation of soil is not probable. Much of the surface of the island is still only bare, calcareous stone, exposed to the fierce winds, rains, and scorching sunshine. A process of disintegration is constantly going on which gradually reduces this surface rock to friable matter, and as soon as a space becomes favorable in its conditions by such means it is promptly improved by the natives for agricultural purposes. The extraordinary success

which crowns the husbandman's efforts is the triumph of industry over natural obstacles. All soil is but broken and decomposed rock, pulverized by various agencies acting during long periods of time, counting centuries as days. The molten lava poured from the fiery mouth of Vesuvius has, in the course of ages, become the soil of thriving vineyards at Resina and Castellamare. The Bahama Islands, composed originally of coral and limestone, have, during the lapse of centuries, become such fertile soil at the surface as to nourish the royal palm, the orange, and the banana, together with the stout-limbed ceiba and the most delicate fruits of the tropics. It should be remembered, also, that vegetation does not depend alone upon the soil for its life and fruitfulness. Like human beings, it borrows vitality from the rain and atmospheric air.

This Maltese soil must be of a very prolific nature, and contain hidden properties which stimulate plant life beyond comparison, to furnish the means of support for so large a number of inhabitants in so circumscribed a space. It is true that cattle, sheep, and grain are regularly imported for the consumption of the garrison and the people, as the island does not yield sufficient meat and breadstuff for the support of the population; but other products which are raised here and exported go far towards balancing the deficiency, by the grain and other needed supplies which they purchase in return. Two articles, salt and soda, are produced upon the island and exported in considerable quantities, the annual income from which reaches

a large aggregate sum. The early potatoes which are grown in several districts of these islands are of a very choice character, commanding a special market in England, and realizing good prices. So the Atlantic cities on the American coast depend upon Bermuda for their early supply of the same article. Where the ground is not cultivated, wild-growing masses of the prickly pear often form a feature of the landscape, while the almost entire absence of trees in the larger island, outside of the city, creates an arid appearance. The charming color and grateful shade which are afforded by groves is almost entirely wanting. Neither art nor nature can produce an effective landscape without their aid. Where the land is carefully improved, it is not unusual to realize three crops annually from the same ground, by a timely succession of seeds. It is the common practice to follow the harvesting of a grain crop by immediately planting the same field with cotton. This last article has long been an established product of Malta, where it is believed to be indigenous. The islands produce two kinds of cotton, one of which is pure white, the other of a yellowish brown, both having a staple combining length and silkiness in a peculiar degree. It will thus be seen that the capacity of the soil and climate is very comprehensive, and it is interesting to know that there are over sixty thousand acres of land under cultivation in Malta at the present writing.

The climate is so equable and mild that there is no sterile period of the year, no unproductive month in the twelve. Every division of the season has its special vegetation and its fragrant

flowers, thus rendering the reign of floral beauty ceaseless. March and April, however, are the months which present the most luxuriant phase of vegetation in this latitude. Though Malta lies much farther south than Naples, the heat of summer is not so intense there as it is in southern Italy. The plants which are so liberally displayed in the balconies of the dwellings require no shelter all the year round. Thus at all times striking bits of color line the second stories of the houses upon the Strada Reale. It will depend somewhat upon the stranger's fancy whether he is attracted by these beautiful flowers, so vivid in color, or by the graceful forms, the lovely olive-hued faces, and appealing eyes, which are half hidden behind them, like screened batteries. One cannot closely observe the use of the Maltese hood, presumed the insignia of modesty, without becoming convinced that it serves in no small degree the same purpose as the Spanish fan in the hands of an accomplished Andalusian woman.

The obtaining of three crops annually from the same field is not only remarkable in itself, but is also significant of the prevailing industry of the Maltese, as well as of the fertility of the soil and the propitiousness of the climate for agricultural enterprise. It is observed that in sheltered places, where the soil is quite neglected by the hand of man, nature exhibits often a wanton luxuriance of vegetable growth almost tropical. Another obvious reason for this marked fertility of the cultivated soil should be mentioned, namely, that the natives understand and fully appreciate the great value of manure, which no artificial

fertilizer can equal in permanent results. Like the Chinese, the people here achieve excellent returns in agriculture by deserving them. The most unwilling soil will succumb to such persevering and intelligent treatment. The careful collection and application of domestic refuse to the land is systematically pursued by the farmers, which process is conducive to cleanliness and health as well as to good husbandry, thus serving a twofold purpose.

Were the same liberal use of easily obtained enrichment, together with a system of irrigation (also well understood in Malta), to be applied to our constantly abandoned farms in New England, we should hear much less grumbling as regards their sterility, while the returns which would be realized in the shape of an ample harvest would liberally compensate for all cost of time and labor. There is no zone where nature will do everything for man; his work upon the farm is only begun with the planting of the seed. The fact is, many of our farmers work on the principle of the Kodak man, – "You touch the button, and we do the rest." Sitting down in indolence and despair, such men wonder that their utterly neglected lands do not yield better crops, talking the while about rich fields and virgin soil which are supposed to exist somewhere, far away in Utopia.

Until the author visited Malta, he thought that the British island of Barbadoes, the farthest windward of the West Indian group, was the most densely populated spot on the globe, but here we find human beings numbering over thirteen hundred to the productive square mile. One intelligent statistician places

the population at fourteen hundred, but the first estimate is quite extraordinary enough. As a matter of comparison, it may be mentioned that the population of England averages three hundred souls to a similar space. The steady increase of the people in numbers speaks well for the average health of Malta, on whose dry soil and in whose usually pure air children thrive and adults live to an extreme old age. The residents have a saying that invalids are obliged to go away to Nice or Mentone, on the mainland, to die, since no one shuffles off this mortal coil by natural means in Malta. There is certainly nothing in the local conditions or in the geographical position to generate any sort of malady. No vegetable matter is permitted to decompose, nor are objectionable substances allowed to remain aboveground. Malta no doubt has its drawbacks, but its climate, as a rule, is very healthy. "Malta healthy?" responded a local physician to our inquiry. "Why, we professionals are simply starved out for want of practice." "How about the plague and the cholera?" we asked. "Ah, an occasional visit of that sort occurs, to be sure, at wide intervals, otherwise our occupation would be gone." He added, "All the world is liable to such visitations; but as to the general healthfulness of this island, no one can justly find fault." Such is probably the truth. English physicians continue to send certain classes of their patients hither regularly.

The men one meets outside of the city, in and about the villages, engaged upon the land, or otherwise, form a hardy, swarthy, and capable race, – industrious, ignorant, and very

pious. These men, on an average, are not quite so tall as those of North America, but they are strong, broad-shouldered, frugal, and honest, with a decided Moorish cast of countenance, whose usual expression is a compound of apathy and dejection. That the Maltese are a temperate people is very plain. Drunkenness is scarcely ever to be met with even in the humbler portions of the capital, or along the shores of the harbor, where seamen congregate, and where every facility for indulgence is easily procurable. It is but fair to say that sobriety of habit is the rule among the common classes of the people. In the rural districts great simplicity of life prevails. Vegetable diet is almost universal, varied by an occasional meal of fish. Meat is much more costly, and is seldom indulged in by ordinary people, in town or country. Fish, which abounds along the shore, is both cheap and nourishing. Shell-fish, especially, are a favorite food in Malta. We say meat is costly; it is only so, as compared with the means of the common people, and the amount of money they realize in the form of wages. Beef sells in the market here at about the same price as is charged in our Atlantic cities. Considerable mutton is raised in the group, but the beef which is used for food purposes is nearly all brought from over the sea, the larger portion coming from the Barbary coast. As regards the cost of living at Malta, that depends so much upon individual requirements that no general rule applies, but it is certainly considerably less expensive than at either Nice or Cannes.

A certain inclination for seclusion is observable among the

Maltese women in all parts of the group. They are rarely, if ever, seen abroad with their husbands. Their predilection for indoor life is pronounced, and when hastening to morning mass through the streets of Valletta, the shielding black hood is always in requisition, unrelieved by a touch of bright or cheerful color. The general effect is nun-like and funereal. There is an axiom current here to the effect that "A woman should never appear abroad but twice, – on the day of her marriage, and that of her funeral." This sentiment emphasises in a degree the fact of the Eastern origin of the people. No such absolute seclusion as this saying implies is, however, observed here. Though the faldetta is universally worn, still, as we have already intimated, many women use it in so coquettish a manner that they not only expose their pretty faces, but they also manage to see all that goes on about them. The average woman is very much the same, whether in Cairo, on the Strada Reale, Malta, or on the Champs Elysées, – whether in the atmosphere of the Mediterranean, or on the banks of the Seine. The semi-Oriental custom of the sex, as observed in these islands, is doubtless a relic of their association with and descent from the Mohammedans. As they neither use nor understand a word of any language except Maltese Arabic, it is of course impossible for a stranger to hold conversation with them. One would have to speak, not Turkish, but Maltese Arabic, to do so.

The land in Malta is universally terraced on the side-hills. This method serves a double purpose: that of beautifying the landscape, while it secures the soil in its proper place, as one

sees it in Switzerland or on the Rhine. Being of a spongy nature, the soil retains the moisture for a long time, thus insuring fertility. Though there are long periods during which no rain falls, little trouble is realized from drought. The ownership of the land is about equally divided between the English government, the church, and two or three thousand farming proprietors. The Roman Catholic institution is the same leech upon the common people here that it proves to be on the mainland and in European countries, keeping the ignorant, superstitious class in indigence by taxing its individual members up to the last point of endurance, and beclouding their humble mental capacity. How else could a swarming tribe of useless non-producers like the priesthood be supported in well-fed, sensual idleness, and the costly ornamentation and ceremonies of the church be maintained? There is said to be a priest for every thirty families in the group, men who are intensely bigoted and ridiculously ignorant outside of their professional routine, but who are the apt tools of more able personages who hold higher positions in the church. They are ever ready to show their credulous parishioners pieces of the true cross and other sham relics "to whet their almost blunted appetite." Yet it may be doubted if these cunning Maltese agents of the Romish church could go any further in this direction than was lately done by a priest of the same denomination in the city of New York, who pretended to exhibit for worship a bone from the body of St. Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary, which anxious hundreds of deluded people

were "permitted" to kneel down and kiss!

Do not let us talk any more about idol worship among the Fiji tribes or the people of "Darkest Africa," while we have in our midst such barefaced trickery under the veil of religion.

The humble owners of the land in Malta, as we have tried to show, are naturally a thrifty, hard-working people, neither rich nor poor. The reader would be surprised to see how much of seeming plenty, comfort, and contentment exists among these sturdy natives under such adverse circumstances. Notwithstanding their uncultured condition, the lowly country people have a genius for poetry; indeed, all Eastern tribes who speak the Arabic tongue are thus endowed. This talent finds expression in a sort of improvisation, by which means two persons will hold earnest converse with each other, asserting and denying in something very like epic poetry. They chant their words in a wild, Maltese sing-song, which appear exactly to accord one with the other, though the music seems to be equally improvised with the ideas of the singer. However unconventional the words and the music may be, there is still a certain rude harmony in both, evidently animated now and then by gorgeous gleams of fancy.

These Maltese are a prolific race, marry quite young, rear large families, and are very fond of their children. Brides only thirteen years of age are common among the working classes. It is a touching sight to watch these childlike mothers with a crude instinct gently fondling their tiny babes, – dolls, we were about

to write. It recalled far-away Japan, where the daily life of the humbler classes presents similar domestic tableaux. Japan is a land of babies, where the annual crop is marvelously sure. In both instances, these youthful mothers, as may naturally be supposed, grow old in appearance at a comparatively early age. It requires no prophet to declare that premature maternity entails premature old age.

We do not intend to convey the idea that ignorance and its natural consequences do not prevail among the Maltese peasantry, when we say that there is much of seeming comfort and contentment to be found among them. As an average class, these children of the soil exhibit only too clearly their want of culture and intelligence. The priests oppose all efforts to improve them by schools. Education is virtually tabooed by the church, it being held that devotion to the Roman Catholic religion is all that is necessary for their spiritual or earthly welfare. Said a famous English general: "Thinking bayonets are dangerous. What we require in a soldier is a machine that knows just enough to obey orders." So it is with the followers of the Roman Catholic faith; people who can read and reason for themselves are "dangerous," so far as putting trust in that bigoted creed is concerned. What the church requires is machines which will obey orders, and yield up their hard-earned wages to support the priesthood and the regal Romish palace of the Pope at Rome. Any unprejudiced observant traveler in Spain, Italy, Mexico, or South America will bear witness to the truth of this statement. Not one twentieth

of the inhabitants of this Maltese group can read and write. In populous, overcrowded China, eight tenths of the inhabitants can read and write, and yet the Western nations look upon them as semi-barbarians.

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