

TEUTONIC KNIGHTS

ORGANIZATION AND HISTORY

1190 - 1809

Scarcely less renowned than the Knights Templars, the Teutonic Knights carried the spirit and traditions of the great military religious orders of the Middle Ages far into the modern period. No earlier date for the foundation of the order than 1190 is given on recognized authority, its actual beginning, like that of the other orders of its kind, being humble and obscure.

It appears that about 1128 a wealthy German, having participated in the siege and capture of Jerusalem, settled there, and soon began to show pity for his unfortunate countrymen among the pilgrims who came, receiving some of them into his own house to be cared for.

When the work became too great for him there, he built a hospital, in which he devoted himself to nursing sick pilgrims, to whose support he likewise gave all his wealth. Still the task

outgrew the means at his command, and in order to increase his charity he began to solicit alms. While he took care of the men, his wife performed a like service for poor women pilgrims. Soon they were joined by many of their wealthier countrymen who had come to fight for the Holy Land. Presently they "banded themselves together, after the pattern of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, and united the care of the sick and poor with the profession of arms in their defence, under the title of Hospitalers of the Blessed Virgin." These Teutonic Hospitalers continued their work, in hospital and field, until the capture of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187, and the conqueror, in recognition of their benevolent services, consented that some of them should remain there and continue their work.

Out of these lowly beginnings grew one of the most powerful and widespread of the military religious orders. It was during the siege of Acre, 1189-1191, that the Teutonic Order received its final and complete organization as one of the great military religious orders of Europe.

The German soldiers suffered great miseries from sickness and from their wounds, and as their language was not understood by the French and other European contingents of the crusading army, they were left untended and friendless.

To meet this want, some citizens of Bremen and Lubeck provided a sort of field hospital, and devoted themselves to the care of their wounded and sick countrymen.

These were soon joined by others, and by the brethren of the Hospital of the Blessed Virgin at Jerusalem, whom Saladin had banished from the city, and the little body came to be known by the designation of the Teutonic Knights of the Hospital of the Blessed Virgin at Jerusalem.

It is said that the order owed its constitution to Frederick, Duke of Swabia; but there is much obscurity, and little authentic record to determine this or to furnish particulars of the transaction.

The order seems, however, to have been confirmed by Pope Celestine III, the constitution and rules of the Templars and Hospitalers being taken as the model for the new order, Henry de Walpot being the first master.

This appears to have happened about 1190, though some authorities maintain that it was not till 1191 or even later. While, therefore, the three great orders had much in common, there was this difference in their original foundation. The Hospitalers were at first a nursing order, and gradually became military; the Templars were always purely and solely military; while the Teutonic Knights were from the first both military and nursing.

Contemporary chroniclers compare the Teutonic Knights with the mystic living creature seen by Ezekiel, having the faces of a man and of a lion, the former indicating the charity with which they tended the sick; the latter, the courage and daring with which they met and fought the enemies of Christ.

The Teutonic Knights continued their care of the sick soldiers till Acre was taken in July, 1191, by the united forces of Philip Augustus, King of France, and Richard Coeur de Lion, King of England. After the capture of Acre by the Christian army, Henry de Walpot purchased a site within the city, and built a church and hospital for his order, the first that it possessed. To

these buildings were gradually added lodgings for the members of the order, for pilgrims, and for the soldiers which were enlisted to assist the knights in the field.

All this cost a large sum of money; but, as many wealthy Germans had enrolled themselves as knights, means were not wanting as the occasion for them occurred and the requirements of the order developed. Among the greatest of the earlier benefactors was Frederick, Duke of Swabia, who contributed money and aided the progress of the order by his influence, and, when he died at Acre, was interred in the church of the knights. Contemporary writers speak in the highest terms of his virtues, saying that he lived a hero and died a saint.

At this period and for the rest of its history, the constitution of the Teutonic order embraced two classes of members - the knights and the clergy - both being exclusively of German birth. The knights were required to be of noble family, and, besides the ordinary threefold monastic vows, took a fourth vow, that they would devote themselves to the care of the sick and to fight the enemies of the faith. Their dress was black, over which a white cloak with a black cross upon the left shoulder was worn. The clergy were not necessarily of noble birth, their duties being to minister to the order in their churches, to the sick in the hospitals and on the field of battle.

To these two classes, who constituted the order, were added serving brethren, called Heimlike and Soldner, and in Latin, Familiares. Many of these gave their services gratuitously from religious motives; others received payment and were really servants. The knights selected their esquires from among the serving brothers. All these wore a dress of the same colour as the knights that they might be known at once to belong to the order.

The original rules of the order were very severe. All the members lived in common; they slept in dormitories on small and hard beds; they took their meals together in the refectory, and their fare was meagre and of the plainest quality. They were required to attend the daily services in the church, and to recite certain prayers and offices privately. They were not permitted to leave their convent, nor to write or receive letters, without permission of their superior. Their clothes, armour, and the harness of their horses were all of the plainest description; all gold, jewels, and other costly ornaments being strictly forbidden. Arms of the best temper and horses of good breed were provided. When they marched to battle, each knight had three or four horses, and an esquire carried his shield and lance.

The grand master was elected from the class of the knights only. Next in rank to him was the preceptor, or grand commander, who had the general supervision of the clergy and serving brethren, and who presided in chapter in the absence of the grand master. Next to the

preceptor came the marshal, who acted as lieutenant-general in the field of battle under the grand master.

The third dignitary was the grand hospitaler, who had the superintendence of the hospitals and of all that related to their management. The fourth officer was the trappier, who supplied the knights with their clothing and accoutrements. And, lastly, there was the treasurer, who received and paid all the money that passed through the hands of the order. All these officers were removable, and were commonly changed every year.

As the order extended, new functionaries were required and were appointed; namely, provincial masters of the several countries where the order obtained possessions, who took rank next after the grand master; and there were also many local officers as particular circumstances required. The grand master was not absolute, but was obliged to seek the advice of the chapter before taking any important step, and if he were necessarily absent, he appointed a lieutenant to act for him, who also governed the order after the death of the grand master till his successor was elected.

After the death of Saladin disputes arose among his sons, and the opportunity was seized of commencing a new crusade, the history of which is well known, and in which the Teutonic Knights took an active part. At this time (1197) Henry VI, Emperor of Germany, gave the knights the monastery of the Cistercians, at Palermo, in Sicily, and several privileges and exemptions - a transaction that caused considerable disagreement between the Pope and the Emperor. The knights were, however, finally confirmed in possession of the monastery, and it became the preceptor or chief house of the order in Sicily, where other property was gradually bestowed upon the knights.

Henry de Walpot, the first grand master, died at Acre, in 1200, and was succeeded by Otho de Kerpen, who was an octogenarian at the time of his election, but full of vigor and energy, which he displayed by devoted attention to the duties of his office, and personal attendance upon the sick in the hospitals. During the mastership of Otho de Kerpen, an order of knighthood arose in the north of Europe, which was afterward incorporated with the Teutonic order. Livonia, a country situated on the borders of the Baltic, was at this time still pagan. The merchants of Bremen and Lubeck, who had trading relations with the inhabitants, desired to impart to them the truths and blessings of Christianity, and took a monk of the name of Menard to teach them the elements of the faith. The work succeeded, and Menard was consecrated bishop, and fixed his see at Uxhul, which was afterward transferred to Riga.

The mission, however, as it advanced, aroused the jealousy and suspicion of the pagan nobles, and they attacked and destroyed the new town, with its cathedral and other buildings. The Bishop appealed to his countrymen for help. Many responded to his call, and, as there was at that time no crusade in progress in Palestine, the Pope (1199) was persuaded to accord to those who took up arms for the defence of the Christians in Livonia the same privileges as were given to those who actually went to the Holy Land.

In consequence of these events a military religious order was founded, to assist in this war, called the Order of Christ, which was confirmed by Pope Innocent III, in 1205. The knights wore a white robe, upon which a red sword and a star were emblazoned. They maintained a vigorous and successful conflict with the heathen, till circumstances rendered it desirable that they should be incorporated with the Teutonic Knights.

In the meantime the Latins had seized Constantinople, and set up Baldwin, Count of Flanders, as emperor, and divided the Eastern Empire among themselves. The Teutonic Knights received considerable possessions, and a preceptory was founded in Achaia. Sometime afterward another was established in Armenia, where also the order had obtained property

and territory in return for service rendered in the field. The order also received the distinction of adding to their bearings the Cross of Jerusalem.

The valour of the knights, however, and the active part which they took in all the religious wars of the day, cost them dear, and from time to time their numbers were greatly reduced; so much so that when Herman de Salza was elected grand master (1210) he found the order so weak that he declared he would gladly sacrifice one of his eyes if he could thereby be assured that he should always have ten knights to follow him to battle with the infidels. The vigour of his administration brought new life to the order, and he was able to carry on its mission with such success that at his death there were no less than two thousand German nobles who had assumed the badge of the order and fought under its banner. Large accessions of property also came at this time to the knights in Hungary, Prussia, Livonia, and elsewhere.

In 1214 the emperor Frederick I decreed that the grand master should always be considered a member of the imperial court, that whenever he visited it he should be lodged at the Emperor's expense, and that two knights should always have quarters assigned them in the imperial household. In 1221 the emperor Frederick II, by an imperial act, took the Teutonic order under his special protection, including all its property and servants; exempted them from all taxes and dues; and gave its members free use of all pastures, rivers, and forests in his dominions. And in 1227 Henry commanded that all proceedings in his courts should be conducted without cost to the order. The King of Hungary also, seeing the valour of the knights, endeavoured to secure his own possessions by giving them charge of several of his frontier towns.

It would be unnecessary, as it would be tedious, to repeat all the details of the crusades, the varying successes and defeats, in all of which the Teutonic Knights took part, both in Syria and in Egypt, fighting side by side with their brethren in arms, the Templars and Hospitalers. They continued also their humane services to the sick and wounded, as the following curious contemporary document shows. It forms part of a charter, obtained by one Schweder, of Utrecht, who says that, being at the siege of Damietta, "he saw the wonderful exertions of the brethren of the Teutonic Order, for the succour of the sick and the care of the soldiers of the army, and was moved to endow the order with his property in the village of Lankarn."

It was during the siege of Damietta that the famous St. Francis of Assisi visited the crusading army, and endeavored to settle a dispute that had arisen between the knights and the foot soldiers of the army, the latter being dissatisfied and declaring that they were unfairly exposed to danger as compared with the mounted knights.

In 1226 the grand master was selected by the emperor Frederick and Pope Honorius to be arbitrator in a dispute that had arisen between them. So well pleased were they with his honorable and wise counsel that, in recognition of his services, he and his successors were created princes of the Empire, and the order was allowed to bear upon its arms the Imperial Eagle. The Emperor also bestowed a very precious ring upon the master, which was ever afterward used at the institution of the grand master of the order. Again, in 1230, the Grand master was one of the principal agents in bringing about a reconciliation between the Emperor and Pope Gregory IX, whose dissensions had led to many troubles and calamities.

It has already been mentioned that the King of Hungary bestowed upon the knights some territory on the borders of his dominions, with a view to their defending it from the incursions of the barbarous tribes in the vicinity. The King's anticipations were amply realized. The knights maintained order in the disturbed districts, and by their presence put an end to the incursions of the predatory bands who came periodically to waste the country with fire and sword. The

land soon smiled with harvests, and a settled and contented population lived in peace and quietness.

But no sooner were these happy results attained than the King took a mean advantage of the knights, and resumed possession of the country which they had converted from a desert to a fruitful and valuable district. The consequence was that the wild tribes renewed their invasions, and the reclaimed country once more lapsed into desolation. Then again the King made the border country over to the knights, who speedily reasserted their rights, and established a settled government and general prosperity in the dominion made over to them.

This grant and some others that followed were confirmed to the order by the bull of Pope Honorius III in 1222.

A few years after this the Duke of Poland asked the aid of the order against the pagan inhabitants of the country that was afterward Prussia. These people were very savage and barbarous, and constantly committed horrible cruelties upon their more civilized neighbours, laying waste the country, destroying crops, carrying off cattle, burning towns, villages, and convents, and murdering the inhabitants with circumstances of extreme atrocity, often burning their captives alive as sacrifices to their gods. The grand master consulted with his chapter and with the Emperor on the proposed enterprise, and finally resolved to enter upon it, the Emperor undertaking to secure to the order any territory that they might be able to conquer and hold in Prussia. Pope Gregory IX, in 1230, gave his sanction to the expedition, and conferred on those concerned in it all the privileges accorded to crusaders.

In the following year an army invaded Prussia and erected a fortress at Thorn, on the Vistula, on the site of a grove of enormous oaks, which the inhabitants looked upon as sacred to their god Thor. This was followed, in 1232, by the foundation of another stronghold at Culm. A successful campaign followed, and the castle of Marienwerder, lower down the Vistula, was after some reverses and delays successfully built and fortified. The grand master then established a firm system of government over the conquered country, and drew up laws and regulations for the administration of justice, for the coining of money, and other necessary elements of civilization. Other fortified places were built which gradually developed into cities and towns.

But all this was not affected without many battles and much patient endurance, and frequent defeats and checks.

Nor did the knights forget the spiritual needs of their heathen subjects. Mission clergy laboured among them, and by their instruction, and still more by their holy, self-denying lives, they succeeded in winning many to forsake their idols and become Christians. The order received an important accession to its ranks at this time (1237) by the incorporation into it of the ancient Order of Christ, in Livonia, which had considerable possessions. This was followed shortly afterward by an agreement between the order and the King of Denmark, by which the former undertook the defence of the kingdom against its pagan neighbours.

In 1234 the order received into its ranks Conrad, Landgrave of Thuringia and Hesse, a man who had led a wicked and violent life, but, being brought to see his errors, made an edifying repentance, and became a Teutonic Knight, and afterward was elected grand master. This Conrad was brother to Louis of Thuringia, who was the husband of St. Elizabeth of Hungary. After the death of Elizabeth, the hospital at Marburg, where she had passed the latter years of her widowhood in the care of the sick, was made over to the Teutonic Knights, and after her canonization a church was built to receive her remains, and placed under the care of the order.

In 1240 the knights received an earnest petition from the Duke of Poland, for aid against the Turks, who were ravaging his dominions, and by the enormous multitude of their hosts were able to defeat any army he could bring into the field. The knights accepted the invitation, and took part in a series of bloody and obstinate battles, in which they lost many of their number. They had also a new enemy to encounter in the Duke of Pomerania, who had been their ally, but who now sided with the Prussians against them. In the war that ensued the Duke was defeated, several of his strongholds were taken, and he was obliged to sue for peace.

A few years afterward, however (1243), the Duke recommenced hostilities, and with more success. Culm was besieged by him, and the greatest miseries were endured by the inhabitants, the slaughter being so great in the numerous conflicts before the walls that at last very few men remained. The Bishop even counselled the widows to marry their servants, that the population of the town might not become extinct. The war was continued for several years with varying fortune, till a peace was at last concluded, principally through the mediation of the Duke of Austria.

About this time a disputed election caused a schism in the order, and two rival grand masters for several years divided the allegiance of the knights, till Henry de Hohenlohe was recognized by both sides as master. During his term of office successful war was carried on in Courland and other neighbouring countries, which resulted in the spread of Christianity and the advance of the power of the order. At the same time, the Teutonic order took part in the crusades in Palestine, and shared with the Templars and Hospitalers the successes and reverses there. It would be tedious to enter upon all the details of the conflicts undertaken by the order against the Prussians and others; suffice it to say that the knights, though often defeated, steadily advanced their dominion, and secured its permanence by the erection of fortresses, the centres about which cities and towns ultimately arose. Among these were Dantzic, Koenigsberg, Elbing, Marienberg, and Thorn.

By the year 1283 the order was in possession of all the country between the Vistula and the Memel, Prussia, Courland, part of Livonia, and Samogitia; commandeers were established everywhere to hold it in subjection, and bishoprics and monasteries were founded for the spread of Christianity among the heathen population. In the contests between the Venetians and the Genoese, the Teutonic Knights aided the former, and in 1291, after the loss of Acre, the grand master took up his residence in Venice. About this time the Pope originated a scheme for the union of the three orders of the Hospitalers, the Templars, and the Teutonic Knights, into one great order, purposing at the same time to engage the Emperor and the kings of Christendom to lay aside all their quarrels, and combine their forces for the recovery once for all of the Holy Land. Difficulties without number, which proved insuperable, prevented the realization of this scheme. Among these was the objection raised by the Teutonic Knights, that while the Hospitalers and Templars had but one object in view - the recovery of Palestine, their order had to maintain its conquests in the North of Europe, and to prosecute the spread of the true faith among the still heathen nations.

In 1309, when all hope of the recovery of the Christian dominion in the East had been abandoned, and no further crusades seemed probable, it was determined to remove the seat of the grand master from Venice to Marienberg.

At a chapter of the order held there, further regulations were agreed upon for the government of the conquered countries, some of which are very curious, but give an interesting picture of the state of the people and of society at that period. Thus it was commanded that no Jew, necromancer, or sorcerer should be allowed to settle in the country. Masters who had slaves, and generally Prussians, prisoners of war, were obliged to send them to the parish church to be instructed by the clergy in the Christian religion. German alone was to be spoken, and the

ancient language of the country was forbidden, to prevent the people hatching conspiracies, and to do away with the old idolatry and heathen superstitions. Prussians were not allowed to open shops or taverns, nor to act as surgeons or accoucheurs.

The wages of servants were strictly settled, and no increase or diminution was permitted. Three marks and a half a year were the wages of a carpenter or smith, two and a half marks of a coachman, a mark and a half of a labourer, two marks of a domestic servant, and half a mark of a nurse. Masters had the right to follow their runaway servants, and to pierce their ears; but if they dismissed a servant before the end of his term of service, they must pay him a year's wages. Servants were not allowed to marry during time of harvest and vintage, under penalty of losing a year's wages and paying a fine of three marks. No bargains were to be made on Sundays and festivals, and no shops were to be open on those days till after morning service.

Sumptuary laws of the most stringent nature were passed, some of which appear very singular. At a marriage or other domestic festival, officers of justice might offer their guests six measures of beer, tradesmen must not give more than four, peasants only two. Playing for money, with dice or cards, was forbidden. Bishops were to visit their dioceses every three years, and to aid missions to the heathen. Those who gave drink to others must drink of the same beverage themselves, to avoid the danger of poisoning, as commonly practised by the heathen Prussians. A new coinage was also issued.

The next half-century was a period of general prosperity and advance for the order. It was engaged almost incessantly in war, either for the retention of its conquests or for the acquisition of new territory. There were also internal difficulties and dissensions, and contests with the bishops. In 1308 the Archbishop of Riga appealed to Pope Clement V, making serious charges against the order, and endeavouring to prevail upon him to suppress it in the same way as the Templars had lately been dealt with. Gerard, Count of Holstein, however, came forward as the defender of the knights. A formal inquiry was opened before the Pope at Avignon in 1323. The principal charges brought forward by the Archbishop were, that the order had not fulfilled the conditions of its sovereignty in defending the Church against its heathen enemies; that it did not regard excommunications; that it had offered insolence to the Archbishop, and seized some of the property of his see, and other similar accusations. The grand master explained some of these matters, denied others, and produced an autograph letter of the Archbishop's, in which he secretly endeavoured to stir up the Grand Duke of Lithuania to make a treacherous attack upon some of the fortresses of the knights. The end of the matter was that the case was dismissed, and there is little doubt that there were serious faults on both sides.

The times were indeed full of violence, cruelty, and crime. The annals abound with terrible and shameful records, bloody and desolating wars, and individual cases of oppression, injustice, and cruelty. Now a grand master is assassinated in his chapel during vespers; now a judge is proved to have received bribes, and to have induced a suitor to sacrifice the honour of his wife as the price of a favourable decision. Wealth and power led to luxury and sensuality, the weaker were oppressed, noble and bishop alike showing themselves proud and tyrannical. There are often two contradictory accounts of the same transaction, and it is impossible to decide where the fault really was, when there seems so little to choose between the conduct of either side.

The conclusion seems forced upon us that human nature was in those days much the same as it is now, and that riches and irresponsible authority scarcely ever fail to lead to pride and to selfish and oppressive treatment of inferiors. When we gaze upon the magnificent cathedrals that were rising all over Europe at the bidding of the great of those times, we are

filled with admiration, and disposed to imagine that piety and a high standard of religious life must have prevailed; but a closer acquaintance with historical facts dissipates the illusion, and we find that then as now good and evil were mingled. The history of the order for the next century presents little of interest. In 1388 two of the knights repaired to England by order of the grand master, to make commercial arrangements with that country, which had been rendered necessary by the changes introduced into the trade of Europe by the creation of the Hanseatic League. A second commercial treaty between the King of England and the order was made in 1409. The order had now reached the summit of its greatness. Besides large possessions in Germany, Italy, and other countries, its sovereignty extended from the Oder to the Gulf of Finland. This country was both wealthy and populous. Prussia is said to have contained fifty-five large fortified cities, forty-eight fortresses, and nineteen thousand and eight towns and villages. The population of the larger cities must have been considerable, for we are told that in 1352 the plague carried off thirteen thousand persons in Dantzic, four thousand in Thorn, six thousand at Elbing, and eight thousand at Koenigsberg. One authority reckons the population of Prussia at this time at two million one hundred and forty thousand eight hundred. The greater part of these were German immigrants, since the original inhabitants had either perished in the war or retired to Lithuania. Historians who were either members of the order or favorably disposed toward it, are loud in their praise of the wisdom and generosity of its government; while others accuse its members and heads of pride, tyranny, luxury, and cruel exactions. In 1410 the Teutonic order received a most crushing defeat at Tannenberg from the King of Poland, assisted by bodies of Russians, Lithuanians, and Tartars. The grand master, Ulric de Jungingen, was slain, with several hundred knights and many thousand soldiers. There is said to have been a chapel built at Gruenwald, in which an inscription declared that sixty thousand Poles and forty thousand of the army of the knights were left dead upon the field of battle. The banner of the order, its treasury, and a multitude of prisoners fell into the hands of the enemy, who shortly afterward marched against Marienberg and closely besieged it. Several of the feudatories of the knights sent in their submission to the King of Poland, who began at once to dismember the dominions of the order and to assign portions to his followers. But this proved to be premature. The knights found in Henry de Planau a valiant leader, who defended the city with such courage and obstinacy that, after fifty-seven days' siege, the enemy retired, after serious loss from sorties and sickness. A series of battles followed, and finally a treaty of peace was signed, by which the order gave up some portion of its territory to Poland. But a new enemy was on its way to inflict upon the order greater and more lasting injury than that which the sword could effect. The doctrines of Wycklif had for some time been spreading throughout Europe, and had lately received a new impulse from the vigorous efforts of John Huss in Bohemia, who had eagerly embraced them, and set himself to preach them, with additions of his own. Several knights accepted the teaching of Huss, and either retired from the order or were forcibly ejected. Differences and disputes also arose within the order, which ended in the arrest and deposition of the grand master in 1413. But the new doctrines had taken deep root, and a large party within the order were more or less favourable to them, so much so that at the Council of Constance (1415) a strong party demanded the total suppression of the Teutonic order. This was overruled; but it probably induced the grand master to commence a series of persecutions against those in his dominions who followed the principles of Huss. The treaty that had followed the defeat at Tannenberg had been almost from the first disputed by both parties, and for some years appeals were made to the Pope and the Emperor on several points; but the decisions seldom gave satisfaction or commanded obedience. The general result was the loss to the order of some further portions of its dominions. Another outbreak of the plague, in 1427, inflicted injury upon the order. In a few weeks no less than eighty-one thousand seven hundred and forty-six persons perished. There were also about this time certain visions of hermits and others, which threatened terrible judgments upon the order, because, while it professed to exist and fight for

the honour of God, the defence of the Church, and the propagation of the faith, it really desired and laboured only for its own aggrandizement.

It was said, too, that it should perish through a goose (oie), and as the word "Huss" means a goose in Bohemian patois, it was said afterward that the writings of Huss, or more truly, perhaps, the work of the goose-quill, had fulfilled the prophecy in undermining and finally subverting the order. There were also disputes respecting the taxes, which the people declared to be oppressive, and finally, in 1454, a formidable rebellion took place against the authority of the knights.

Casimir, King of Poland, who had long had hostile intentions against the order, secretly threw all his weight into the cause of the malcontents, who made such way that the grand master was forced to retire to Marienberg, his capital, where he was soon closely besieged. Casimir now openly declared war, and laid claim to the dominions of the knights in Prussia and Pomerania, formally annexing them to the kingdom of Poland.

The grand master sent petitions for aid to the neighbouring princes, but without success. The kings of Denmark and Sweden excused themselves on account of the distance of their dominions from the seat of war. Ladislaus, King of Bohemia and Hungary, was about to marry his sister to Casimir, and the religious dissensions of Bohemia and the attacks of the Turks upon Hungary fully occupied his attention and demanded the employment of all his troops and treasure; and finally the capture of Constantinople by Mahomet at this very time (1458) seemed to paralyze the energies of the European powers.

The grand master, Louis d'Erlichshausen, thus found himself deserted in his time of need. He did what he could by raising a considerable body of mercenaries, and with these, his knights, and the regular troops of the order, he defended himself with courage and wonderful endurance, so that he not only succeeded in holding the city, but recovered several other towns that had revolted. But his resources were unequal to the demands made upon them, his enemy overwhelmed him with numbers, his own soldiers clamoured for their pay long overdue, and there was no prospect of aid from without. There was nothing left, therefore, to him but to make the best terms he could. He adopted the somewhat singular plan of making over Marienberg and what remained of the dominions of the order to the chiefs who had given him aid, in payment for their services, and he himself, with his knights and troops, retired to Koenigsberg, which then became the capital of the order. Marienberg soon afterward came into the hands of Casimir; but the knights again captured it, and again lost it, 1460. War continued year after year between Poland and the knights, the general result of which was that the latter were defeated and lost one town after another, till, in 1466, a peace was concluded, by the terms of which the knights ceded to Poland almost all the western part of their dominions, retaining only a part of Eastern Prussia, with Koenigsberg for their capital, the grand master acknowledging himself the vassal of the King of Poland, with the title of Prince and Councillor of the kingdom. In 1497 the order lost its possessions in Sicily through the influence of the Pope and the King of Aragon, who combined to deprive it of them. It still retained a house at Venice, and some other property in Lombardy. In 1511 Albert de Brandenburg was elected grand master. He made strenuous efforts to procure the independence of the order, and solicited the aid of the Emperor to free it from the authority of Poland, but without success. The grand master refused the customary homage to the King of Poland, and, after fruitless negotiations, war was once more declared, which continued till 1521, when peace was concluded; one of the results of which was the separation of Livonia from the dominion of the order, and its erection into an independent state. All this time the doctrines of Luther had been making progress and spreading among all classes in Prussia and Germany. In 1522 the grand master went to Nuremberg to consult with the Lutherans

there, and shortly afterward he visited Luther himself at Wittenberg. Luther's advice was decided and trenchant. He poured contempt upon the rules of the order, and advised Albert to break away from it and marry. Melancthon supported Luther's counsels. Shortly after, Luther wrote a vigorous letter to the knights of the order, in which he maintained that it was of no use to God or man. He urged all the members to break their vow of celibacy and to marry, saying that it was impossible for human nature to be chaste in any other way, and that God's law, which commanded man to increase and multiply, was older than the decrees of councils and the vows of religious orders. At the request of the grand master he also sent missionaries into Prussia to preach the reformed doctrines. One or two bishops and many of the clergy accepted them, and they spread rapidly among the people. Services began to be said in the vulgar tongue, and images and other ornaments were pulled down in the churches, especially in the country districts. In 1525 Albert met the King of Poland at Cracow, and formally resigned his office as grand master of the Teutonic order, making over his dominions to the King, and receiving from him in return the title of hereditary Duke of Prussia. Shortly afterward he followed Luther's advice, and married the princess Dorothea of Denmark. Many of the knights followed his example. The annals and archives of the order were transferred to the custody of the King of Poland, and were lost or destroyed during the troubles that subsequently came upon that kingdom.

A considerable number of the knights refused to change their religion and abandon their order, and in 1527 assembled in chapter at Mergentheim to consult as to their plans for the future. They elected Walter de Cronberg grand master, whose appointment was ratified by the Emperor, Charles V. In the religious wars that followed, the knights fought on the side of the Emperor, against the Protestants. In 1595 the commandery of Venice was sold to the Patriarch and was converted into a diocesan seminary; and in 1637 the commandery of Utrecht was lost to the order. In 1631 Mergentheim was taken by the Swedes under General Horn.

In the war against the Turks during this period some of the knights, true to the ancient principles of their order, took part on the Christian side, both in Hungary and in the Mediterranean. In the wars of Louis XIV, the order lost many of its remaining commandeers, and by an edict of the King, in 1672, the separate existence of the order was abolished in his dominions, and its possessions were conferred on the Order of St. Lazarus. When Prussia was erected into a kingdom, in 1701, the order issued a solemn protest against the act, asserting its ancient rights over that country. The order maintained its existence in an enfeebled condition till 1809, when it was formally abolished by Napoleon. In 1840 Austria instituted an honorary order called by the same name, and in 1852 Prussia revived it under the designation of the Order of St. John.

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