

### The Last Service of Agia Sophia

IT IS a significant fact that the folk songs for years preceding the fall of Constantinople were pessimistic, but that immediately after the occupation of the city by the Turks in 1453 they began to be more cheerful and to predict the reoccupation of the city by the Greeks.

The walls of Constantinople were battered down in several places by huge cannon molded by one Orban, a Hungarian, at Adrianople. He had been in the service of the Emperor, but deserted and went over to Mahomet II, for better pay. The last Byzantine Emperor, Constantine Paleologos, died fighting at the head of his feeble garrison, after the Turks had broken into the town. He had refused proposals to escape from the city, while there was yet time. Lamartine says of him that "History has not as yet given sufficient attention to this great man; truth demands that he should be lifted up ill glory all the more as he was abased and betrayed by fortune."

The poem which follows is founded on one of the oldest folk songs, prophesying the reoccupation of the city by the Greeks. According to legend, the last Christian service in St. Sophia, before the entry of the Turks, was interrupted at the singing of the so-called "Cherubic Anthem," and the next service will begin where the last one left off, .and finish it.

This service was probably on the evening before the entry of the Turks. As for the exact spot where Sultan Mahomet II passed into the town:

"About the hour of noon Sultan Mahomet, surrounded by his Viziers, his pashas and his guards, rode through the breach at the gate of St. Romanos into the city which he had conquered. He alighted at the church of St. Sophia." (Creasy's History of the Ottoman Turks, Vol. I, p. 135) and, "when the Sultan himself passed in triumph through the gate of St. Romanos," Gibbon. The object of this strong and intelligent man in proceeding immediately to the church of St. Sophia, and taking possession of it, was officially to demonstrate the triumph of Mohammedanism over Christianity.

### ***Paraphrase of Old Folk Song***

I

In the Church of the Heavenly Wisdom, in Christianity's temple and home,  
They were chanting the mystical Anthem of the Saints and the High Cherubim,  
And the sound of the singing resounded to the lofty and resonant dome,  
While the priests swung the glittering censers till the temple was fragrant and dim.  
God was ringing the bells of heaven while the bells of the temple rang.  
They were sixty and two in number, with a deacon and priest for each one; 'Twas the Patriarch  
led the singing and the  
King at his left hand sang,  
And the very columns were trembling before that great singing was done.  
Then the Archangel cried out of heaven and said to the singers, "Be still,  
Cease chanting the Cherubic Anthem, put the  
Host and the Symbols away,  
And blowout the candles, Ye Fathers, for this is the heavenly will,  
That Christ should be thrust from his dwelling, and the Turk in the city hold sway.  
"Only cry out to distant Frankland for three vessels from over the sea,  
One each for the Cross and the Bible, to bear them to Christian lands,  
And one for our Holy Table, the goodliest ship of the three,  
To save it from desecration and pollution of infidel hands."

*(Interruption of Folk Song.)*

II

The great cannon made  
By the Hun renegade  
Like a fierce beast of prey  
Growled on day by day  
And the Sultan's dire Horde Crept close as it roared,  
Till at last they broke in;  
Then Christ's true Paladin,  
Paleologos the King,  
With his leal knights and few Faced that hideous crew,

He stood staunch in that ring  
Of blood-thirsting steel  
With his few knights and leal  
And fought on till he died.  
So Christ's hero and saint  
In extremity tried  
Left a name without taint,  
And the crown that he won,  
The great glory of him,  
Is as bright as the sun  
And shall never grow dim.  
For his pale, deathless brow  
This, my poor garland, now;  
But some day there will spring From the race of the king  
Some bard filled with the fire  
Of the old Grecian choir;  
Some late son of that throng  
Who'll triumphantly know  
How to weave him a crown  
Of immortal renown  
From the roses of song  
That on Helicon blow.  
The fierce Sultan rode through  
The Romanos Capou  
And Christ's temple became  
The world's byword and shame  
And a sign from that hour  
Of the Antichrist' s power.

III

Over earth's fairest regions the foul Octopod  
Threw its hideous tentacles, dripping with tears,  
With its heart and its beak in the Temple of God,  
And strangled their life through the desolate years.  
And he fed on the honor of virgins; his beak  
With the blood of slain babies dripped horribly red;  
He butchered by millions Armenian and Greek,  
Till all Europe stank with the massacred dead.  
But in heaven sits waiting the wise, patient Christ,  
And a thousand years unto Him are but as a day,

For He knows, when the sorrow and shame have sufficed,  
That Justice will conquer and Right come to stay.  
When the Patriarch hanged in his robes, and the choir  
Of the massacred babes begin sweetly to sing  
Till the Cherubic Hymn spreads through heaven like fire,  
Then the bells up in heaven will joyfully ring,  
And again will the bells of St. Wisdom give voice  
To a jubilant clamor beneath the great dome  
Shouting out to His people: "Be glad and rejoice  
Christ has come back again to His temple and home."  
Oh, the years they are weary, the years they are long,  
Yet this is my prayer and this hope I hold dear:  
When St. Sophia's bells and the Cherubic Song  
Ring out once again, may I be there to hear!

#### **IV**

*(Resumption and End of Old Folk Song.)*

The Mother of Christ lamented, but the Archangel's voice was heard:  
"Give not way to despair, Holy Mother, nor permit that the eyes divine  
Should be bitter with too much weeping; after ages of hope deferred,  
And after long years of sorrow, all' this shall again be Thine!"