

And from an aureole of jewelled rays,
The Savior's countenance doth calmly gaze.
Fixed is the silver altar, raised the screen,
A golden network prinked red, blue, and green,
With icons studded, hung with lamps of fire,
And ruby curtained round the sacred choir.
Then, on a slab above the western door,
Through which, next day, the multitude shall pour,
That all may see and read, the sculptors grave:
"This House to God, Justinian, Emperor, gave."

And now, with trumpet-blast and booming gong
Betwixt long lines of an expectant throng,
The imperial procession sweeps along.
The saffron bags and crimson banners flare
Against the fair blue sky above the square.
In front the walls of Holy Wisdom glow,
A frost of jewels set in banks of snow.
Then back the people start on either side,
As ripples past a molten silver tide
Of Asian troops in polished mail; next pass
Byzantine guards, a wave of Corinth brass.
And then, with thunder tramp, the Varanger bands
Of champions gathered from grey northern lands,
Above whom Odin's raven flaps its wings;
And, in their midst, in a gold-harnessed ring
Of chosen heroes, on a cream-white steed
In gilded trappings, of pure Arab breed,
To dedicate his church doth Caesar ride
In all his splendor, majesty, and pride.

With fuming frankincense and flickering lights
The vested choir come forth as he alights.
Now shrill the silver clarions loud and long,
And clash the cymbals, bellows hoarse the gong,
A wild barbaric crash. Then on the ear
Surges the solemn chanting, full and clear:
"Lift up your heads, ye gates, and open swing,
Ye everlasting doors before the King!"
Back start the silver valves - in sweeps the train,
Next throng the multitude the sacred fane.

Justinian enters, halts a little space,
With haughty exultation on his face,
And, at a glance, the stately church surveys.
Then reads above the portal of the nave;
"This House to God, Euphrasia, widow, gave."
"What ho! he thunders, with a burst of ire,
As to his face flashes a scarlet fire;
"Where is the sculptor? Silence, all you choir!
Where is the sculptor?" Falls the choral throng
A hush fall instant on the mighty throng.
"Bring forth the sculptor who you x sentence wrought;
His merry jest he'll find full dearly bought."
Then fell before him, trembling, full of dread,
The graver. "Caesar, God-preserved!" he said,
"I carved not that! exchanged has been the name
From that I chiselled. I am not to blame.
This is a miracle - no mortal hand
could banish one and make another stand,
And on the marble leave no trace.
Where was the name deep cut, it did efface.
Beside the letters, Sire, the stone is whole."

"Ha!" scoffed the Emperor, now my soul,
I deemed the age of marvels passed away."
Forth stepped the Patriarch with,
"Sire, I pray, harken! I saw him carve, nor I alone,
thy name and title which have fled the stone;
And I believe the finger was Divine which set another
name and cancelled thine-
The finger that, which wrote upon the wall
Belshazzar's doom, in Babel's sculptured hall;
The finger that, which cut in years before on Sinai's top,
on tables twain, the Law."
Justinian's brow grew dark with rage and fear:
"Who is Euphrasia, widow, I would hear,
This lady who my orders sets at naught,
and robs me of the recompense I sought,
Who is Euphrasia?"
But none spake a word. "What! of this wealthy lady
~~HERE~~ have none heard?"
Again the concourse silence fell,
for none could answer make, and tidings tell.
What! no man know! Go some the city round,
And ask if such be in Byzantium found."
Then said a priest and faltered:
"Of that name is one, but old,
And very poor, and lame,
Who has a cottage close upon the quay;
But she, most surely, Sire, it cannot be."

"Euphrasia," said the monarch sternly,
"Speak! wherefore did'st thou my strict commandment break
And, give against my orders, to this pile?"
The widow answered simply, with a faint smile,
"Sire, it was nothing; for I only threw a little
straw before the beasts which drew the marble from the ships.
Before I knew thou wouldst be angry, Sire,
I have been ill three weary months and on my window-sill
A little linnet perched, and sang each day so sweet,
It cheered me, as in bed I lay,
And filled my heart with love to Him who sent the linnet to me;
Then with full intent to render thanks, when God did health restore,
I from my mattress pulled a little straw
And cast it to the oxen that did draw the marble burdens -
I did nothing more."

"Lood! cried Caesar, "read above that door!
Small though thy gift, it was the gift of love
And is accepted of our King above,
And mine rejected as the gift of pride
By Him who humbled lived and humbled died.
Widow, God grant, hereafter when we meet,
I may attain a footstool at thy feet!"