

Chapter LXVIII: Reign Of Mahomet The Second, Extinction Of Eastern Empire.--  
Part II.

Among the implements of destruction, he studied with peculiar care the recent and tremendous discovery of the Latins; and his artillery surpassed whatever had yet appeared in the world. A founder of cannon, a Dane [231] or Hungarian, who had been almost starved in the Greek service, deserted to the Moslems, and was liberally entertained by the Turkish sultan. Mahomet was satisfied with the answer to his first question, which he eagerly pressed on the artist. "Am I able to cast a cannon capable of throwing a ball or stone of sufficient size to batter the walls of Constantinople? I am not ignorant of their strength; but were they more solid than those of Babylon, I could oppose an engine of superior power: the position and management of that engine must be left to your engineers." On this assurance, a foundry was established at Adrianople: the metal was prepared; and at the end of three months, Urban produced a piece of brass ordnance of stupendous, and almost incredible magnitude; a measure of twelve palms is assigned to the bore; and the stone bullet weighed above six hundred pounds. [24] [241] A vacant place before the new palace was chosen for the first experiment; but to prevent the sudden and mischievous effects of astonishment and fear, a proclamation was issued, that the cannon would be discharged the ensuing day. The explosion was felt or heard in a circuit of a hundred furlongs: the ball, by the force of gunpowder, was driven above a mile; and on the spot where it fell, it buried itself a fathom deep in the ground. For the conveyance of this destructive engine, a frame or carriage of thirty

wagons was linked together and drawn along by a team of sixty oxen: two hundred men on both sides were stationed, to poise and support the rolling weight; two hundred and fifty workmen marched before to smooth the way and repair the bridges; and near two months were employed in a laborious journey of one hundred and fifty miles. A lively philosopher [25] derides on this occasion the credulity of the Greeks, and observes, with much reason, that we should always distrust the exaggerations of a vanquished people. He calculates, that a ball, even o two hundred pounds, would require a charge of one hundred and fifty pounds of powder; and that the stroke would be feeble and impotent, since not a fifteenth part of the mass could be inflamed at the same moment. A stranger as I am to the art of destruction, I can discern that the modern improvements of artillery prefer the number of pieces to the weight of metal; the quickness of the fire to the sound, or even the consequence, of a single explosion. Yet I dare not reject the positive and unanimous evidence of contemporary writers; nor can it seem improbable, that the first artists, in their rude and ambitious efforts, should have transgressed the standard of moderation. A Turkish cannon, more enormous than that of Mahomet, still guards the entrance of the Dardanelles; and if the use be inconvenient, it has been found on a late trial that the effect was far from contemptible. A stone bullet of eleven hundred pounds' weight was once discharged with three hundred and thirty pounds of powder: at the distance of six hundred yards it shivered into three rocky fragments; traversed the strait; and leaving the waters in a foam, again rose and bounded against the opposite hill.

[26]

[Footnote 231: Gibbon has written Dane by mistake for Dace, or Dacian. *Lax ti kinoV?*. Chalcondyles, Von Hammer, p. 510.--M.]

[Footnote 24: The Attic talent weighed about sixty minæ, or avoirdupois pounds (see Hooper on Ancient Weights, Measures, &c. ;) but among the modern Greeks, that classic appellation was extended to a weight of one hundred, or one hundred and twenty-five pounds, (Ducange, *talanton*.) Leonardus Chiensis measured the ball or stone of the second cannon *Lapidem, qui palmis undecim ex meis ambibat in gyro.*]

[Footnote 241: 1200, according to Leonardus Chiensis. Von Hammer states that he had himself seen the great cannon of the Dardanelles, in which a tailor who had run away from his creditors, had concealed himself several days Von Hammer had measured balls twelve spans round. Note. p. 666.--M.]

[Footnote 25: See Voltaire, (*Hist. Générale*, c. xci. p. 294, 295.) He was ambitious of universal monarchy; and the poet frequently aspires to the name and style of an astronomer, a chemist, &c.]

[Footnote 26: The Baron de Tott, (tom. iii. p. 85--89,) who fortified the Dardanelles against the Russians, describes in a lively, and even comic, strain his own prowess, and the consternation of the Turks. But that adventurous traveller does not possess the art of gaining our confidence.]

While Mahomet threatened the capital of the East, the Greek emperor implored with fervent prayers the assistance of earth and heaven. But the invisible powers were deaf to his supplications; and Christendom beheld with indifference the fall of Constantinople, while she derived at least some promise of supply from the jealous and temporal policy of the sultan of Egypt. Some states were too weak, and others too remote; by some the danger was considered as imaginary by others as inevitable: the Western princes were involved in their endless and domestic quarrels; and the Roman pontiff was exasperated by the falsehood or obstinacy of the Greeks. Instead of employing in their favor the arms and treasures of Italy, Nicholas the Fifth had foretold their approaching ruin; and his honor was engaged in the accomplishment of his prophecy. [261] Perhaps he was softened by the last extremity of their distress; but his compassion was tardy; his efforts were faint and unavailing; and Constantinople had fallen, before the squadrons of Genoa and Venice could sail from their harbors. [27] Even the princes of the Morea and of the Greek islands affected a cold neutrality: the Genoese colony of Galata negotiated a private treaty; and the sultan indulged them in the delusive hope, that by his clemency they might survive the ruin of the empire. A plebeian crowd, and some Byzantine nobles basely withdrew from the danger of their country; and the avarice of the rich denied the emperor, and reserved for the Turks, the secret treasures which might have raised in their defence whole armies of mercenaries. [28] The indigent and solitary prince prepared, however, to sustain his formidable adversary; but if his courage were equal to the peril, his

strength was inadequate to the contest. In the beginning of the spring, the Turkish vanguard swept the towns and villages as far as the gates of Constantinople: submission was spared and protected; whatever presumed to resist was exterminated with fire and sword. The Greek places on the Black Sea, Mesembria, Acheloum, and Bizon, surrendered on the first summons; Selybria alone deserved the honors of a siege or blockade; and the bold inhabitants, while they were invested by land, launched their boats, pillaged the opposite coast of Cyzicus, and sold their captives in the public market. But on the approach of Mahomet himself all was silent and prostrate: he first halted at the distance of five miles; and from thence advancing in battle array, planted before the gates of St. Romanus the Imperial standard; and on the sixth day of April formed the memorable siege of Constantinople.

[Footnote 261: See the curious Christian and Mahometan predictions of the fall of Constantinople, Von Hammer, p. 518.--M.]

[Footnote 27: Non audivit, indignum ducens, says the honest Antoninus; but as the Roman court was afterwards grieved and ashamed, we find the more courtly expression of Platina, in animo fuisse pontifici juvare Græcos, and the positive assertion of Æneas Sylvius, structam classem &c. (Spond. A.D. 1453, No. 3.)]

[Footnote 28: Antonin. in Proem.--Epist. Cardinal. Isidor. apud Spondanum and Dr. Johnson, in the tragedy of Irene, has happily seized this characteristic circumstance:--

The groaning Greeks dig up the golden caverns.  
The accumulated wealth of hoarding ages;  
That wealth which, granted to their weeping prince,  
Had ranged embattled nations at their gates.]

The troops of Asia and Europe extended on the right and left from the Propontis to the harbor; the Janizaries in the front were stationed before the sultan's tent; the Ottoman line was covered by a deep intrenchment; and a subordinate army enclosed the suburb of Galata, and watched the doubtful faith of the Genoese. The inquisitive Philelphus, who resided in Greece about thirty years before the siege, is confident, that all the Turkish forces of any name or value could not exceed the number of sixty thousand horse and twenty thousand foot; and he upbraids the pusillanimity of the nations, who had tamely yielded to a handful of Barbarians. Such indeed might be the regular establishment of the Capiculi, [29] the troops of the Porte who marched with the prince, and were paid from his royal treasury. But the bashaws, in their respective governments, maintained or levied a provincial militia; many lands were held by a military tenure; many volunteers were attracted by the hope of spoil and the sound of the holy trumpet invited a swarm of hungry and fearless fanatics, who might contribute at least to multiply the terrors, and in a first attack to blunt the swords, of the Christians. The whole mass of the Turkish powers is magnified by Ducas, Chalcondyles, and Leonard of Chios, to the amount of three or four hundred thousand men; but Phranza was a less remote and more accurate judge; and his precise definition of two hundred and fifty-eight

thousand does not exceed the measure of experience and probability.

[30] The navy of the besiegers was less formidable: the Propontis was overspread with three hundred and twenty sail; but of these no more than eighteen could be rated as galleys of war; and the far greater part must be degraded to the condition of store-ships and transports, which poured into the camp fresh supplies of men, ammunition, and provisions. In her last decay, Constantinople was still peopled with more than a hundred thousand inhabitants; but these numbers are found in the accounts, not of war, but of captivity; and they mostly consisted of mechanics, of priests, of women, and of men devoid of that spirit which even women have sometimes exerted for the common safety. I can suppose, I could almost excuse, the reluctance of subjects to serve on a distant frontier, at the will of a tyrant; but the man who dares not expose his life in the defence of his children and his property, has lost in society the first and most active energies of nature. By the emperor's command, a particular inquiry had been made through the streets and houses, how many of the citizens, or even of the monks, were able and willing to bear arms for their country. The lists were intrusted to Phranza; [31] and, after a diligent addition, he informed his master, with grief and surprise, that the national defence was reduced to four thousand nine hundred and seventy Romans. Between Constantine and his faithful minister this comfortless secret was preserved; and a sufficient proportion of shields, cross-bows, and muskets, were distributed from the arsenal to the city bands. They derived some accession from a body of two thousand strangers, under the command of John Justiniani, a noble Genoese; a liberal donative was advanced to

these auxiliaries; and a princely recompense, the Isle of Lemnos, was promised to the valor and victory of their chief. A strong chain was drawn across the mouth of the harbor: it was supported by some Greek and Italian vessels of war and merchandise; and the ships of every Christian nation, that successively arrived from Candia and the Black Sea, were detained for the public service. Against the powers of the Ottoman empire, a city of the extent of thirteen, perhaps of sixteen, miles was defended by a scanty garrison of seven or eight thousand soldiers. Europe and Asia were open to the besiegers; but the strength and provisions of the Greeks must sustain a daily decrease; nor could they indulge the expectation of any foreign succor or supply.

[Footnote 29: The palatine troops are styled *Capiculi*, the provincials, *Seratculi*; and most of the names and institutions of the Turkish militia existed before the Canon Nameh of Soliman II, from which, and his own experience, Count Marsigli has composed his military state of the Ottoman empire.]

[Footnote 30: The observation of Philelphus is approved by Cuspinian in the year 1508, (*de Cæsaribus*, in *Epilog. de Militiâ Turcicâ*, p. 697.) Marsigli proves, that the effective armies of the Turks are much less numerous than they appear. In the army that besieged Constantinople Leonardus Chiensis reckons no more than 15,000 Janizaries.]

[Footnote 31: *Ego, eidem (Imp.) tabellas extribui non absque dolore et mstitia, mansitque apud nos duos aliis occultus numerus, (Phranza, 1.*



iii. c. 8.) With some indulgence for national prejudices, we cannot desire a more authentic witness, not only of public facts, but of private counsels.]

The primitive Romans would have drawn their swords in the resolution of death or conquest. The primitive Christians might have embraced each other, and awaited in patience and charity the stroke of martyrdom. But the Greeks of Constantinople were animated only by the spirit of religion, and that spirit was productive only of animosity and discord. Before his death, the emperor John Palæologus had renounced the unpopular measure of a union with the Latins; nor was the idea revived, till the distress of his brother Constantine imposed a last trial of flattery and dissimulation. [32] With the demand of temporal aid, his ambassadors were instructed to mingle the assurance of spiritual obedience: his neglect of the church was excused by the urgent cares of the state; and his orthodox wishes solicited the presence of a Roman legate. The Vatican had been too often deluded; yet the signs of repentance could not decently be overlooked; a legate was more easily granted than an army; and about six months before the final destruction, the cardinal Isidore of Russia appeared in that character with a retinue of priests and soldiers. The emperor saluted him as a friend and father; respectfully listened to his public and private sermons; and with the most obsequious of the clergy and laymen subscribed the act of union, as it had been ratified in the council of Florence. On the twelfth of December, the two nations, in the church of St. Sophia, joined in the communion of sacrifice and prayer; and the names of the two pontiffs

were solemnly commemorated; the names of Nicholas the Fifth, the vicar of Christ, and of the patriarch Gregory, who had been driven into exile by a rebellious people.

[Footnote 32: In Spondanus, the narrative of the union is not only partial, but imperfect. The bishop of Pamiers died in 1642, and the history of Ducas, which represents these scenes (c. 36, 37) with such truth and spirit, was not printed till the year 1649.]

But the dress and language of the Latin priest who officiated at the altar were an object of scandal; and it was observed with horror, that he consecrated a cake or wafer of unleavened bread, and poured cold water into the cup of the sacrament. A national historian acknowledges with a blush, that none of his countrymen, not the emperor himself, were sincere in this occasional conformity. [33] Their hasty and unconditional submission was palliated by a promise of future revisal; but the best, or the worst, of their excuses was the confession of their own perjury. When they were pressed by the reproaches of their honest brethren, "Have patience," they whispered, "have patience till God shall have delivered the city from the great dragon who seeks to devour us. You shall then perceive whether we are truly reconciled with the Azymites." But patience is not the attribute of zeal; nor can the arts of a court be adapted to the freedom and violence of popular enthusiasm. From the dome of St. Sophia the inhabitants of either sex, and of every degree, rushed in crowds to the cell of the monk Gennadius, [34] to consult the oracle of the church. The holy man was invisible; entranced, as it should seem,

in deep meditation, or divine rapture: but he had exposed on the door of his cell a speaking tablet; and they successively withdrew, after reading those tremendous words: "O miserable Romans, why will ye abandon the truth? and why, instead of confiding in God, will ye put your trust in the Italians? In losing your faith you will lose your city. Have mercy on me, O Lord! I protest in thy presence that I am innocent of the crime. O miserable Romans, consider, pause, and repent. At the same moment that you renounce the religion of your fathers, by embracing impiety, you submit to a foreign servitude." According to the advice of Gennadius, the religious virgins, as pure as angels, and as proud as dæmons, rejected the act of union, and abjured all communion with the present and future associates of the Latins; and their example was applauded and imitated by the greatest part of the clergy and people. From the monastery, the devout Greeks dispersed themselves in the taverns; drank confusion to the slaves of the pope; emptied their glasses in honor of the image of the holy Virgin; and besought her to defend against Mahomet the city which she had formerly saved from Chosroes and the Chagan. In the double intoxication of zeal and wine, they valiantly exclaimed, "What occasion have we for succor, or union, or Latins? Far from us be the worship of the Azymites!" During the winter that preceded the Turkish conquest, the nation was distracted by this epidemical frenzy; and the season of Lent, the approach of Easter, instead of breathing charity and love, served only to fortify the obstinacy and influence of the zealots. The confessors scrutinized and alarmed the conscience of their votaries, and a rigorous penance was imposed on those who had received the communion from a priest who had

given an express or tacit consent to the union. His service at the altar propagated the infection to the mute and simple spectators of the ceremony: they forfeited, by the impure spectacle, the virtue of the sacerdotal character; nor was it lawful, even in danger of sudden death, to invoke the assistance of their prayers or absolution. No sooner had the church of St. Sophia been polluted by the Latin sacrifice, than it was deserted as a Jewish synagogue, or a heathen temple, by the clergy and people; and a vast and gloomy silence prevailed in that venerable dome, which had so often smoked with a cloud of incense, blazed with innumerable lights, and resounded with the voice of prayer and thanksgiving. The Latins were the most odious of heretics and infidels; and the first minister of the empire, the great duke, was heard to declare, that he had rather behold in Constantinople the turban of Mahomet, than the pope's tiara or a cardinal's hat. [35] A sentiment so unworthy of Christians and patriots was familiar and fatal to the Greeks: the emperor was deprived of the affection and support of his subjects; and their native cowardice was sanctified by resignation to the divine decree, or the visionary hope of a miraculous deliverance.

[Footnote 33: Phranza, one of the conforming Greeks, acknowledges that the measure was adopted only *propter spem auxilii*; he affirms with pleasure, that those who refused to perform their devotions in St. Sophia, *extra culpam et in pace essent*, (l. iii. c. 20.)]

[Footnote 34: His primitive and secular name was George Scholarius, which he changed for that of Gennadius, either when he became a monk or

a patriarch. His defence, at Florence, of the same union, which he so furiously attacked at Constantinople, has tempted Leo Allatius (*Diatrib. de Georgiis*, in *Fabric. Bibliot. Græc. tom. x. p. 760--786*) to divide him into two men; but Renaudot (p. 343--383) has restored the identity of his person and the duplicity of his character.]

[Footnote 35: *Fakiolion*, *kaluptra*, may be fairly translated a cardinal's hat. The difference of the Greek and Latin habits imbittered the schism.]

Of the triangle which composes the figure of Constantinople, the two sides along the sea were made inaccessible to an enemy; the Propontis by nature, and the harbor by art. Between the two waters, the basis of the triangle, the land side was protected by a double wall, and a deep ditch of the depth of one hundred feet. Against this line of fortification, which Phranza, an eye-witness, prolongs to the measure of six miles, [36] the Ottomans directed their principal attack; and the emperor, after distributing the service and command of the most perilous stations, undertook the defence of the external wall. In the first days of the siege the Greek soldiers descended into the ditch, or sallied into the field; but they soon discovered, that, in the proportion of their numbers, one Christian was of more value than twenty Turks: and, after these bold preludes, they were prudently content to maintain the rampart with their missile weapons. Nor should this prudence be accused of pusillanimity. The nation was indeed pusillanimous and base; but the last Constantine deserves the name of a hero: his noble band of

volunteers was inspired with Roman virtue; and the foreign auxiliaries supported the honor of the Western chivalry. The incessant volleys of lances and arrows were accompanied with the smoke, the sound, and the fire, of their musketry and cannon. Their small arms discharged at the same time either five, or even ten, balls of lead, of the size of a walnut; and, according to the closeness of the ranks and the force of the powder, several breastplates and bodies were transpierced by the same shot. But the Turkish approaches were soon sunk in trenches, or covered with ruins. Each day added to the science of the Christians; but their inadequate stock of gunpowder was wasted in the operations of each day. Their ordnance was not powerful, either in size or number; and if they possessed some heavy cannon, they feared to plant them on the walls, lest the aged structure should be shaken and overthrown by the explosion. [37] The same destructive secret had been revealed to the Moslems; by whom it was employed with the superior energy of zeal, riches, and despotism. The great cannon of Mahomet has been separately noticed; an important and visible object in the history of the times: but that enormous engine was flanked by two fellows almost of equal magnitude: [38] the long order of the Turkish artillery was pointed against the walls; fourteen batteries thundered at once on the most accessible places; and of one of these it is ambiguously expressed, that it was mounted with one hundred and thirty guns, or that it discharged one hundred and thirty bullets. Yet in the power and activity of the sultan, we may discern the infancy of the new science. Under a master who counted the moments, the great cannon could be loaded and fired no more than seven times in one day. [39] The heated metal unfortunately

burst; several workmen were destroyed; and the skill of an artist [391] was admired who bethought himself of preventing the danger and the accident, by pouring oil, after each explosion, into the mouth of the cannon.

[Footnote 36: We are obliged to reduce the Greek miles to the smallest measure which is preserved in the wersts of Russia, of 547 French toises, and of  $104 \frac{2}{5}$  to a degree. The six miles of Phranza do not exceed four English miles, (D'Anville, Mesures Itineraires, p. 61, 123, &c.)]

[Footnote 37: At indies doctiores nostri facti paravere contra hostes machinamenta, quæ tamen avare dabantur. Pulvis erat nitri modica exigua; tela modica; bombardæ, si aderant incommoditate loci primum hostes offendere, maceriebus alveisque tectos, non poterant. Nam si quæ magnæ erant, ne murus concuteretur noster, quiescebant. This passage of Leonardus Chiensis is curious and important.]

[Footnote 38: According to Chalcondyles and Phranza, the great cannon burst; an incident which, according to Ducas, was prevented by the artist's skill. It is evident that they do not speak of the same gun. \*  
Note: They speak, one of a Byzantine, one of a Turkish, gun. Von Hammer note, p. 669.]

[Footnote 39: Near a hundred years after the siege of Constantinople, the French and English fleets in the Channel were proud of firing 300 shot in an engagement of two hours, (Mémoires de Martin du Bellay, l.

x., in the Collection Générale, tom. xxi. p. 239.)]

[Footnote 391: The founder of the gun. Von Hammer, p. 526.]

The first random shots were productive of more sound than effect; and it was by the advice of a Christian, that the engineers were taught to level their aim against the two opposite sides of the salient angles of a bastion. However imperfect, the weight and repetition of the fire made some impression on the walls; and the Turks, pushing their approaches to the edge of the ditch, attempted to fill the enormous chasm, and to build a road to the assault. [40] Innumerable fascines, and hogsheads, and trunks of trees, were heaped on each other; and such was the impetuosity of the throng, that the foremost and the weakest were pushed headlong down the precipice, and instantly buried under the accumulated mass. To fill the ditch was the toil of the besiegers; to clear away the rubbish was the safety of the besieged; and after a long and bloody conflict, the web that had been woven in the day was still unravelled in the night. The next resource of Mahomet was the practice of mines; but the soil was rocky; in every attempt he was stopped and undermined by the Christian engineers; nor had the art been yet invented of replenishing those subterraneous passages with gunpowder, and blowing whole towers and cities into the air. [41] A circumstance that distinguishes the siege of Constantinople is the reunion of the ancient and modern artillery. The cannon were intermingled with the mechanical engines for casting stones and darts; the bullet and the battering-ram [411] were directed against the same walls: nor had the discovery of



gunpowder superseded the use of the liquid and unextinguishable fire. A wooden turret of the largest size was advanced on rollers this portable magazine of ammunition and fascines was protected by a threefold covering of bulls' hides: incessant volleys were securely discharged from the loop-holes; in the front, three doors were contrived for the alternate sally and retreat of the soldiers and workmen. They ascended by a staircase to the upper platform, and, as high as the level of that platform, a scaling-ladder could be raised by pulleys to form a bridge, and grapple with the adverse rampart. By these various arts of annoyance, some as new as they were pernicious to the Greeks, the tower of St. Romanus was at length overturned: after a severe struggle, the Turks were repulsed from the breach, and interrupted by darkness; but they trusted that with the return of light they should renew the attack with fresh vigor and decisive success. Of this pause of action, this interval of hope, each moment was improved, by the activity of the emperor and Justiniani, who passed the night on the spot, and urged the labors which involved the safety of the church and city. At the dawn of day, the impatient sultan perceived, with astonishment and grief, that his wooden turret had been reduced to ashes: the ditch was cleared and restored; and the tower of St. Romanus was again strong and entire. He deplored the failure of his design; and uttered a profane exclamation, that the word of the thirty-seven thousand prophets should not have compelled him to believe that such a work, in so short a time, could have been accomplished by the infidels.

[Footnote 40: I have selected some curious facts, without striving to

emulate the bloody and obstinate eloquence of the abbé de Vertot, in his prolix descriptions of the sieges of Rhodes, Malta, &c. But that agreeable historian had a turn for romance; and as he wrote to please the order he had adopted the same spirit of enthusiasm and chivalry.]

[Footnote 41: The first theory of mines with gunpowder appears in 1480 in a MS. of George of Sienna, (Tiraboschi, tom. vi. P. i. p. 324.)

They were first practised by Sarzanella, in 1487; but the honor and improvement in 1503 is ascribed to Peter of Navarre, who used them with success in the wars of Italy, (Hist. de la Ligue de Cambray, tom. ii. p. 93--97.)]

[Footnote 411: The battering-ram according to Von Hammer, (p. 670,) was not used.--M.]