

## Constantinople Fears The First Circus Girl Empress's Prophecy Is To Be Fulfilled



The Ruins of Justinian's and Theodora's Palace on the Sea of Marmora.

Constantinople, Aug. 27. WHEN Lieutenant Sidney D. Hancock, flying over the Turkish defenses of the Dardanelles recently, dropped a shell on the Hymeneal Palace of Justinian, where lies buried the Empress Theodora, a shiver went over Turkey. For over the empire of the Crescent hangs the prophecy of the famous Queen:

"When the foes of my faith come conquering, they shall know my grave and let me sleep;

When the friends of my faith come conquering, they shall know not, and move me from my bed."

To the English lines has leaked the story from the Turks that the English aviator's bomb fell near the foot of Theodora's tomb, breaking the effigy in half, so that the splendid woman now sits half-upright, staring with sightless eyes for the coming of the Christians—"of her faith."

The Palace of Joy, in which Theodora lived for almost three years before she was successful in manipulating the passage of the law which enabled Justinian to marry her and make her empress, was built at her request. A native of Cyprus, that island of olive groves circled by the blue waters of the Mediterranean, Theodora loved the sea. To please her whim, the great Justinian built this palace on the very extremity of a point of land jutting out into the Sea of Marmora, just before it narrows into the Dardanelles. Two Summers, at least, after she became empress, Theodora spent there, and its name was changed to the Hymeneal Palace. Then the former circus girl thought its beauties not sufficiently magnificent for her, and she lived in Summertime thereafter in a palace built by the emperor on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus.

The columns of the Hymeneal Palace, stepping daintly down into the waters of the Sea of Marmora, have made an ideal landing place for Turkish troops and munitions. As a dwelling place, the palace has long been a ruin, but most of the columns still remain and it is not all unroofed.

Rumor tells that beneath the palace—as, indeed, beneath every palace where Theodora made her home—are many underground passages and dungeons. It is known that these have been used as a storehouse for explosives by the Ottoman forces defending that Gallipoli peninsula. It was these stores that the British aviator was trying to destroy. According to his own report, his own shell exploded, doing considerable damage, but the underground stores, in dungeons carved out of the solid rock, were not detonated by the shock.

Owing to its position, the Hymeneal Palace is safe from destruction by the allied fleets as long as the shelling is from the side of the Aegean Sea. Should, however, the Bosphorus be forced and the garrison entrenched on the peninsula be attacked from the Sea of Marmora side, it is probable that the Hymeneal Palace would be blown to atoms, as it is in the direct line of fire from the Turkish forts commanding that inland sea.

It is of a character with the extraordinary force of Theodora's



The Empress Theodora—from the Painting by Constans.

life that over thirteen hundred years after she has passed away her memory should still be powerful. History records no stranger life than hers, raised from a ribald clown to the throne of the Byzantine Emperors, the august mistress of the world. So marvellous was her personal force, so unbridled her passions and so vindictive was her revenge that Procopius of Caesarea, her backstairs biographer, declares that she was demon rather than Queen.

There is a shuddering horror in that mediaeval Greek relic of Procopius called "Anecdotes," which bears out the general belief of her time that there was something inhuman in Theodora. No student of Byzantine history can fail to

note the fear of her that swayed the whole world in the century in which she lived. There is something so characteristic of Theodora in the figure of the broken effigy, as reported, half-sitting, listening eagerly to the fighting overhead and the groans of dying and wounded that it creates instant belief.

Daughter of an animal-trainer, Acacius, the "keeper of the bears," Theodora made her first entrance into the spotlight, soon after her father's death. All the political "rings" and all the church factions were allied to the "blue" or the "green" parties of the circus, the colors being worn by charioteers in the races. For over two hundred years bitter party rivalry

### Prophecy Is To Be Fulfilled

### The Bomb of an English Airman Breaks the Effigy

### of the Great Theodora in Justinian's Ruined Palace and Gives New Life to a Strange Legend of One of History's Most Picturesque Women



A Mosaic of the Empress Theodora in the Church of St. Vitalis, Ravenna, Supposed to Be an Authentic Portrait.

in sports was the menace of the Byzantine Empire. Kings were made and unmade, Popes seated and expelled by the influence of a "blue" or "green" favorite of the circus. Theodora's father was a "green."

As soon as he died, Acacius's widow hastily married another animal-trainer, so as to keep the circus position in the family. But a more eager claimant had pulled wires even faster, and when Theodora's mother applied she was informed that the post was already awarded. Accordingly, at the next exhibition the widow paraded in front of the grand stand with her three daughters, aged thirteen, eleven and five years, behind her, the girls wearing the minimum of clothing prescribed by the somewhat lax rules of the circus.

The elder sister, at once was given by the "blues" a small part in the pantomime, and before she was fourteen her support was assured by admirers. Theodora, after only a few months as an assistant to her sister, branched out for herself. She became a buffoon, or clown, her extreme youth excusing more audacious performances than even that loose time would usually tolerate. Even her worst enemies admitted that she was screamingly funny and her unprintable coarseness was forgiven for this reason.

At the age of seventeen she declared that she was tired of the life of Constantinople and accompanied Ecebolus, Governor of the province of Ethiopia, to his capital. There she remained for three years, when he dismissed her, loaded with jewels. His accusation was that she was too "fret-hot in soul to be only a woman." The Ethiopians believed her to be a mere panther.

Theodora returned home by easy stages, travelling through Asia Minor and making conquests wherever she went. When at last she returned to Constantinople she was twenty-two years old, possessed of great riches and at the height of her attractions.

Procopius, who has no words vile enough by which to call her,

cannot help but praise her beauty. He has a little fling at her by saying that she looked unhealthy, but admits that her marvellous eyes haunted a man forever if he had seen them close to him only once. "Eyes that eat up the face," he called them. She was small, dark, and radiated femininity like a spell. The only remaining picture of her, a mosaic in the church of St. Vitalis, Ravenna, does not show her to be so beautiful, according to modern standards, but it must be remembered that mosaic does not lend itself to portraiture.

When she returned to Constantinople, Theodora sent for Bellisarius, the commander-in-chief, whom she had met in Asia. The great General came on the instant—as did every man to whom Theodora called—and the old friendship was resumed. Through Bellisarius, Theodora met Justinian, the Emperor. To meet Theodora was to become ensnared. Two weeks later the circus girl took up her residence in the imperial palace. A friend of Theodora named Antonina was introduced to Bellisarius to compensate him for his loss, and she made the famous General a faithful and devoted wife.

Although Justinian was so serious-minded and unimpassioned a man that it was a common saying that he had "missed youth on the way to manhood," the lure of Theodora held him fast. From the day that she set foot in the palace the same chain of strange and demonic events began which had haunted Ecebolus. The cords tightened closer and closer around Justinian. But there could be no marriage, for the law forbade any one of noble birth, or holding exalted rank, to marry any woman of known dissolute life.

Theodora persuaded first the emperor, then the leaders of the "blue," to annul this law, and shortly afterwards she was married to Justinian with great pomp and display. Not content with that, soon after she was made co-equal with him as Empress of the Roman Empire in her own right.

With the reins of power in her hand, Theodora showed true greatness. Though her enemies might plot against her, the Empress always was the strongest. Her knowledge seemed nothing less than supernatural. Scores of people declared that they had seen a familiar spirit at her elbow. It was known that Justinian was continually haunted by a shadowy clawed creature. Night after night he paced the imperial palace at Constantinople with this Evil Thing whispering behind him, while Theodora was sunk in a strange white-faced sleep.

Evil as that dark shadow may have been, its counsels were not. The reign of Justinian is marked in history by some of the finest results of the first millennium. The great code of laws, the "Pandects," and the "Institutes," were planned in those haunted cogitations. The demon may have whispered plans of extortion and extreme taxation, but—save for the extravagances of Theodora—the money was wisely spent. Marvellous buildings sprang up throughout the Byzantine Empire, even the great Church of St. Sophia being the work of Justinian.

At last came the plague. One out of every six persons in Constantinople died. Both Justinian and Theodora sickened, and it was long before they overcame the infection. But "people, like nations, never quite recover" from the plague, and Theodora grew weaker. Three years later she died from a cancer that developed from a plague spot. Wrapped in gold, her body was laid in state in the Triclinion.

Just on the point of land where the Dardanelles widens into the Sea of Marmora, the ruins of the Hymeneal Palace stand, those ruins rent apart by the bomb of the British aviator. And Theodora waits, unknowing whether the Cross or the Crescent shall surmount the great Church of St. Sophia that Justinian built in honor of the circus girl who became Empress and Mistress of the World.



Justinian, the Great Emperor, Who Warned the Circus Girl, Preparing His Famous Code of Law with His Advisors.