CHAPTER VI.

BYZANTINE

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." — Hebrews.

Rome and her inhabitants were so bound up with their pagan traditions and beliefs that Constantine thought it almost impossible to Control a Christianized empire from that city as a center. Accordingly he founded a new city, Byzantine, later named Constantinople in his honor, where religious conservation should place no further impediments in his way. After careful deliberation this city was chosen for its advantageous location. It is situated on the European side of the Channel Bosporus, near to its opening into the Sea. The narrow arm of the sea, called the Golden Horn, extends into the land so as to form a safe and most commodious harbor, with water of sufficient depth to float the largest men of war. His wisdom in selecting this commanding situation, the gate-way between the East and the West, has been universally recognized and the site has often been contended for by both the Orient and the Occident.

Rome had become too military to inspire her subjects with the sentiment and feeling necessary to produce an interesting art. It was in a decline, cold, and in detail uninspiring. Though the public lacked a clear conception of the purpose or style of the new art, with slow but persistent growth and development, they were able to blend the various elements which contributed to its formation, into an organic whole and leave to the world a style of their own.

The best craftsmen from all the accessible centers of culture were enlisted in the new capital, and in the atmosphere of excitement and the awakening of a new religious feeling, produced designs which best expressed the innermost thoughts of the people.
Though this period is known as a Christian age, it is to be remembered that the people wearing Byzantine costumes were not all Christians, but had the beliefs of many other religious sects. The different nations had mingled to such an extent, that it could scarcely be said that there was any decided type or characteristic of this period.

The style of dress of this period goes to the extreme in both ways, some growing richer and others becoming more simple. There seemed to be no limit in the use of gaudy colors, costly jewels and elaborate materials. The people were lavish in their use of the newly found treasures and this period is marked by the grandeur of the personal adornment. Whole dresses were covered with patterns of precious stones or with bits of beautiful glass held in embroidery similar to the mosaic designs. Gold and silver cloths were used for head-dress linings, spangles covered the veils and the people have been accurately described as walking jewelry shops worth thousands of dollars.

**The Gown.** The form of the dress was changed but little, though the extensive mass of drapery was missing. The tunic of the Romans became the gown of the Byzantinians and the toga became the mantle. The gown was made more shapely about the neck, being gathered at the neck into either a wide or narrow band, or cut in a plainer fashion to fit the throat. This is illustrated in the painting of the Christ Child by Hoffman. (Illustration 18.)

**The Mantle.** One gown was worn over another and arranged to show the various colors at the bottom or else in panels down the front. As the designs became more irregular in shape, the neck and sleeves took on different forms, thus giving a greater variety to the lines of the costume. The sleeves gradually became better coverings for the arms and the girdle changed to a handsome belt or twisted sash. The mantle, coming from the semi-circular Roman toga, remained about the same in form but was smaller. It hung in folds from the shoulder to the bottom of the skirt or trailed on the ground,
NO. 18. BYZANTINE COSTUMES AND ORNAMENTS

1. Square and its subdivisions
2. Circle and its subdivisions
3. Gown
4. Holy Monogram
but the front was fastened with a cord or clasp rather than being draped from one side over the other. (See Frontispiece.)

**Sandals.** Shoes and sandals similar to those of the Romans were still worn.

**Veils.** Veils continued to be the most popular head-dress, but were not so loosely draped as in the classic period. A band of cloth or of metal set with precious stones encircled the head just above the brow and held the veil in place. This gave another opportunity for a greater play of color, as a cloth of beautiful color and texture could be placed over the head before the veil was put on.

The hair was worn in long braids decorated with long strings of pearls and other jewels.

**Designs.** The designs of the textiles gave the garments a most interesting appearance. Some were covered with figures, such as the Gospel figures, and all manner of conventional floral patterns were used; those of beasts inclosed in geometric patterns were not at all uncommon. Tapestries and fabrics with inwoven designs seem to have been the most artistic, though the embroidered and applied figure designs and printed fabric designs were more popular.

**Tapestries.** Rare pieces of the tapestries of the time which have been preserved and are now to be seen in different museums show that the warp and the woof were sometimes both of linen; at other times of linen and wool, while at others, the warp was of silk. There were rarely more than twelve colors employed, purple, violet, brown and red for the background and violet indigo, pale blue, two tones of yellow, orange, several tones of green and a blue black for the weaving of the designs. Large tapestries were used like silks as hangings in churches. Some smaller ones were used to adorn the garments of the living while still others were used on the linen tunics for covering the dead. All of these are of value to those who are interested in the designs of this period, for all are characteristic of the time.

The ornaments of the pagan and Christian worlds were combined in this period, one adding strength and the other richness of form
and of color to the new units. The traditional shape of the Greek and Roman period was united with the emblems of Christianity. The designs were both formal and pictorial; that is, the constructive lines were geometric in shape, but the detail was often naturalistic. The whole surface of the cloth was frequently laid off into circles or into squares connected by circles. These forms enclosed scenes from the Bible or incidents in the daily life of the people. Elaborate borders were made after the same fashion as well as the frets which were combined with the floral decorations.

**Colors.** The colors most characteristic were those found in metals, and jewels, copper green, golden yellows, silver gray, etc.

**The Holy Monogram.** This is the one design that stands out more forcibly than the others, because it was used as Constantine's standard when he accepted Christianity as the state religion. It was the combination of the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ and was known as the "Monogram of the Savior," "the Cross of Constantine" or the portentous sign he saw in the heavens, "The Precious SignPotent." In this design it will be noticed that even the construction lines are suggestive of the semi-circle and the square. (Illustration 18—No. 4.)

During a campaign against one of his rivals, Constantine is said to have been converted to Christianity. He was invoking the gods of success on his cause when suddenly there appeared a pillar of light in the sky in the form of a cross, and beneath it the inscription,—"IN HOC SIGNO VINCES." "In this sign thou shalt conquer."

**The Circle.** The circle was an emblem of eternity, it having no point which could be considered the end. This idea was often used as a decorated circular band, a wreath, a plain band enclosing the square or cross, or merely as construction work as previously mentioned. (Illustration 18—No. 2.)

**The Square.** This was symbolic of the New Jerusalem, and was used as the foundation for many of the most elaborate designs. "And the
city lieth four-square, and the length was large as the breadth; and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.” — Rev. 21-15.

The Cross. The cross had been used in many forms during the classic period, but the Byzantine cross has peculiarities of its own, the lower limb is the longest, like the so-called Latin cross but the extremities of the top and arms expand, rather than continue straight. This cross covered with jewels or displayed in a field of stars, often seen with this design, was supposed to have been associated with the vision of a radiant cross seen in the sky between Jerusalem and Golgotha. The cross raised on steps, or rising from two acanthus leaves, and the cross with double traverse, often called the patriarchal cross, were other types of cross used. (Illustration 19—No. 4.)

The Vine. The vine was used with other forms of ornament and symbols for decorative borders and medallions ever suggestive of the text “I am the vine ye are the branches.” (Illustration 19—No. 8.)

The Dove. The dove was either represented in downward flight with outspread wings or soaring in the air carrying an olive branch. “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: And Lo! the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.” The idea of the dove carrying the olive branch was taken from the story of the Ark: (Illustration 19—No. 2.)

“And again he (Noah) sent forth the dove out of the ark; And the dove came unto him in the evening; and lo in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off.”

The Lamb. The lamb was the symbol of Christ and carried the cross or holy monogram. (Illustration 19—No. 3.) “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” John 1-29.
As the Christian religion was a new one, and the people were anxious to show all their feelings in a public way, even the colors had a religious significance, still adhered to in the decoration of some churches. White was the symbol of the Creator, or of purity; blue, of the Virgin Mary, Heavenly Trust and Sanctification; red, of divine zeal, the creative force and the love of God; purple, of dignity; green, of eternal youth; gold, of virtue or the glory of God; bright yellow, of fruitfulness; violet, of humility and suffering. Metallic effects of all kinds are characteristic of the decoration of this period.

After a people have been surfeited in the way of elaborate dress and intricate jewelry they grow tired of it and go back to the plainest of garments and ornaments. This was true of the Christians who, in their longing for simplicity in every form, discarded all and adopted simple garments with neither ornaments nor gay colors. This same revolt against the ornate has often been repeated in history, and the same results have always followed. For a time, the people have been contented, but it is human nature to love variety and, as with the early Christians, the simple things gave way to those with more life and greater attractions. The Art is gradually built up to a point where the best of the nation is shown in it, then the love of over decoration by those having less ability, drags it down again, only to be started afresh by some other group or nationality.

The time of the beginning of a reform is never so interesting and the styles of costumes during such a period have never had any great influence on the styles of succeeding periods. It is when art is at its best, when people are alive to all that is around them; when a simple growth has developed a beautiful form, and has not yet been destroyed by exaggeration that the best forms of costumes and ornaments are produced. Hence, we omit the uninteresting part of the history of the Occidental world, and study the Orient, not to return to the Occident until it is filled with more that is attractive and influential.
LESSON VI.

Make a sheet of sketches showing a Byzantine costume and two or more Byzantine designs. Color at least one design. Notice the combination of the circular and square spotting. Make an original design for a silk waist, using the circular lines found in the Byzantine style. Select beads of Byzantine metallic effect for the ornament.

Make a long girdle with a decoration showing the constructive lines of Byzantine style and detail of original design. This decoration may be placed at the end of the girdle and be made of beads, embroidered or dyed. (A) Make a Byzantine Mantle or Gown out of paper or cloth (C) Arrange, on a sheet, bits of modern trimmings, cloth or prints of costumes which resemble the Byzantine.