

# The Benediction - song lyrics

American Old-time song lyrics from [www.traditionalmusic.co.uk](http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk)

THE BENEDICTION.

By Francois Coppee.

It was in eighteen hundred-yes- and nine,  
That we took Sarngossa, What a day  
Of untold horrors! I was sergeant then.  
The city carried, we laid siege to houses,  
All shut up close, and with a treacherous look,  
Raining down shots upon us from the windows.  
'Tis the priest's doing! "was the word passed 'round;  
So that, although since daybreak under arms-  
Our eyes with powder smarting, and our mouths  
Bitter with kissing cartridge-ends-piff! paff!  
Rattled the musketry with ready aim.  
If shovel, hat and long black coat were seen  
Flying in the distance. Up a narrow street  
My company worked on. I kept an eye  
On every house-top, rigid and left, and saw  
From many a roof flames suddenly burst forth,  
Coloring the sky as from the chimney-tops  
Among the forges. Low our fellows stooped,  
Entering the low-pitched dens. When they came out,  
With bayonets dripping red, their bloody fingers  
Signed crosses on the wall; for we were bound,  
In such a dangerous defile, not to leave  
Foes lurking in our rear, There was no drum-beat,  
No ordered march. Our officers looked grave;  
The rank and file uneasy, jogging elbows  
As do recruits when flinching.  
All at once,  
Rounding a corner, we are hailed in French  
With cries for help. At double-quick we join  
Our hard-pressed comrades. They were grenadiers,  
A gallant company, but beaten back  
Inglorious from the raised and flag-paved square,  
Fronting a convent. Twenty stalwart monks  
Defended it-black demons with shaved crowns,  
The cross in white embroidered on their frocks,  
Barefoot, their sleeves tucked up, their only weapons  
Enormous crucifixes, so well brandished  
Our men went down before them. By platoons  
Firing we swept the place-in fact, we slaughtered  
This terrible group of heroes, no more soul  
Being in us than in executioners.

The foul deed done-deliberately done-  
And the thick smoke rolling away, we noted  
Under the huddled masses of the dead,  
Rivulets of blood run trickling down the steps;  
While in the background solemnly the church  
Loomed up, its doors wide open. We went in.  
It was a desert. Lighted tapers starred  
The inner gloom with points of gold. The incense  
Gave out its perfume. At the upper end.  
Turned to the altar, as though unconcerned  
In the fierce battle that had raged, a priest.  
White-haired and tall of stature, to a close  
Was bringing tranquilly the mass. So stamped  
Upon my memory is that thrilling scene,  
That, as I speak, it comes before me now-  
The convent built in old time by the Moors;  
The huge brown corpses of the monks; the sun  
Making the red blood on the pavement steam;  
And there, framed in by the low porch, the priest;  
And there the altar brilliant as a shrine;  
And here ourselves, all halting, hesitating,  
Almost afraid.

From the music archive at [www.traditionalmusic.co.uk](http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk)

I, certes, in those days  
Was a confirmed blasphemer. 'Tis on record  
That once, by way of sacrilegious joke,  
A chapel being sacked, I lit my pipe  
At a wax candle burning on the altar.  
This time, however, I was awed-so blanched  
Was that old man!

"Shoot him!" our captain cried.  
Not a soul budged. The priest beyond all doubt  
Heard; but, as though he heard not, turning 'round,  
He faced us with the elevated Host.  
Having that period of the service reached  
When on the faithful benediction falls.  
His lifted arms seemed as the spread of wings;  
And as he raised the pyx, and in the air  
With it described the Cross, each man of us  
Fell back, aware the priest no more was trembling  
Than if before him the devout were ranged.  
But when, intoned with clear and mellow voice,  
The words came to us-

Vos benedicat  
\*Deus Omnipotens!  
The captain's order  
Rang out again and sharply, "Shoot him down,  
Or I shall swear!" Then one of ours, a dastard,  
Leveled his gun and fired. Upstanding still,  
The priest changed color, though with steadfast look  
Set upwards, and indomitably stern.  
Pater et Filius!  
Came the words. What frenzy,  
What maddening thirst for blood, sent from our ranks  
Another shot, I know not; but 'twas done.

The monk, with one hand on the altar's ledge,  
Held himself up; and strenuous to complete  
His benediction, in the other raised  
The consecrated Host. For the third time  
Tracing in air the symbol of forgiveness,

With eyes closed, and in tones exceeding low,  
But in the general hush distinctly heard,  
Et Sanctus Spiritus!  
He said; and, ending  
His service, fell down dead.  
The golden pyx  
Rolled bounding on the floor. Then, as we stood.  
Even the old troopers, with our muskets grounded,  
And choking horror in our hearts, at sight  
Of such a shameless murder and at sight  
Of such a martyr, with a chuckling laugh,  
Amen!  
Drawled out a drummer boy.