

LETTER FROM ROME.

IF, in matters artistic, ours is not a very productive age, at least we can pique ourselves upon a spirit of appreciation, nay, almost reverence, truly in advance of former centuries. Yes, they may call modern drawing-rooms epitomes of modern times, and indeed there seems not a little resemblance between the world of to-day and those curiosity shops where Pompeian lamps and Japanese fans, Eastern rugs and Sévres china, are huddled together in wild confusion; but at least we have infinite respect for the individual; and though the unities composing a whole may be small and multifarious enough, still they are left intact. All are permitted now to aspire to the topmost branch of the tree, only, as no one will submit, schoolboy-like, to posing as the step of another, we all remain smiling at its foot. But surely the contemplation of beaming mediocrity and not too discontented Democracy should afford us some satisfaction. I hardly think the time will come again when Pagan temple or arch will have owed its preservation solely to a mistaken idea of its Christian origin or to the appropriation of its ruins to a church.

From the seventh century the Forum, as the Forum, ceased to exist. Mediæval castles rose among the fallen monuments of ancient times, and the sacred edifices of a new religion strove hard to obliterate all memory of their glorious predecessors. But, sadder still, many of the buildings of old Rome were looked upon as little better than vast quarries. Lime-kilns and stonemasons' yards invaded her basilicas, and priceless bronzes were melted down for coin. Then came a period when the fortresses and walls of the Middle Ages were demolished in their turn, and the space we see to-day, some forty feet below the level of the surrounding ground, was but a mass of rubbish from which protruded a few melancholy columns. In 1547 Paul III. did indeed begin to unearth these relics, but his plan was soon abandoned. Then the place became a cattle market, and the glorious name of Forum Romanum changed into that of "Campo Vaccino."

Strangely symbolical I find those curious medleys of Pagan temples and Christian churches—those parasite buildings skirting the ruins of ancient Rome, and that

Apostolic statues climb,
To crush the imperial urn, whose ashes slept sublime.

After all, it would appear little more than the metamorphosis of Jupiter into Peter the Jew. But of this later. For now are we once more wandering in the Forum, once more gazing upon what, so long as there be English tourists and enquiring Americans, will never again lie buried, nay, will stand until the clamps themselves have clamps.

Chiefly due to Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire, were the excavations made in the Forum before 1876, the spiritual rulers of Rome, it seems, never having evinced the least possible enthusiasm in furthering these. We visited last, I think, the Basilica Julia, that magnificent edifice which was built partly with a view to drawing off the people from the overcrowded Forum. It was rectangular in form, and the central space, paved with rich marbles, was surrounded by double aisles, separated by columns. Here were held the sittings of the Centumviri. Now, standing in the Via Sacra, we turn towards the column of Phocas, "Pignoble Phocas," according to Ampère, "que tout le monde connaît grâce à Corneille." This beautiful pillar, stolen from some temple, was erected in 608 in honour of the Eastern tyrant, and marked the centre of the Forum. Rambling thus, you see, we are not of those

That would explore,
Discuss and learnedly.

But rather of the

Many who have crossed the earth,
That they may give the hours to meditation,
And wander, often saying to themselves,
"This was the Roman Forum!"

And here it stood, that wonderful Forum, extending southwards from the foot of the Capitol. No, you may possess all the imagination you please, but unless you have seen a modern piazza crowded with long-cloaked, gesticulating Italians, it is difficult to picture what this ancient square must have been. Surrounding the large central space were the shops of butchers and other craftsmen, and later, those of goldsmiths and money-changers. Flashing in the sunlight on every hand, rare marbles, gilded bronzes, statues—flashing still brighter for the glorious traditions they commemorated. Then, rising proudly toward the azure sky, temples, columns, arches, of such magnificence—alas! we ne'er may look upon their like again. To-day little more remains besides some few crumbs dropped from the devouring maw of Time, some ghastly foundations, and brick walls deprived of costly linings of polished stone. It is, then, almost with feelings of victory that we behold an arch or pillar on whose strong face the never-ceasing ebb and flow of ages has but softened the contours. Only if our work outlives the space allotted to human productions, our weaknesses survive as well to prove that we are still mortals. Thus, upon the beautiful and wonderfully preserved arch of Septimus Severus, which stands to the north of the Forum, the petty manifestation of Caracalla's hatred of his brother is still seen in the erasure of Geta's name. Near this arch figured the Rostra, or orators' tribune, erected by Julius Cæsar. It was a huge platform, sixty-five feet long and sixteen feet wide, and derived its name from the iron prows of ships with which it was formerly adorned. No wonder men's tongues ran glibly and their thoughts darted forth strong and fearless, when, free in body, they felt as unfettered in mind. In those days an orator was not cramped within a witness-box affair, neither was his audience an exasperating mass of rustling silk, creaking boots, and nervous coughs. No, underneath "God's loveliest sky," gazed upon by eager, passionate faces, great souls spoke words we may wait in vain to hear again.

Of the little that remains of the Rostra, two balustrades, however, are in good preservation, their bas-reliefs giving an excellent idea of the former appearance of the Forum. Upon the Umbilicus Romæ, a small pyramid close by, were inscribed all distances within the city, as upon the Milliarium Aureum those without the walls. This latter was the central milestone of roads radiating from Rome. Thus might they well say, "Tutte le strade conducono a Roma."

The ancient Via Sacra is but a prototype of one of the modern streets of the city—a way which turned north and south and east and west, always retaining the same name. Descending from the Capitol, we find remnants of its pavement under the arch of Septimus Severus. Again, between the Forum and the Basilica Julia, and then turning around the temple of Julius Cæsar, it runs southward for a long distance till it is found bending westward and passing beneath the arch of Titus.

More than two thousand years ago Tarquinius Priscus, fifth of the kings, in order to drain this once marshy valley lying between the Palatine and the Capitol, constructed the wonderful Cloaca Maxima, which even now does good service. Parts of it are laid bare at the extremity of the Basilica Julia, in a mill near the river, where the waters of a spring were caused to increase its current, and at the Ponto Rotto, where it opens into the Tiber.

And now we come to what, perhaps, is the saddest portion of the Forum—shapeless masses, giving barely an outline of the foundations of former edifices; or, more melancholy still, proud Pagan columns ruthlessly appropriated to Christian churches. For these, one has almost a feeling of sympathy; it is as if the figure of Jupiter were made to bear aloft a basin of holy water. With the temple of Castor and Pollux, however, fate has dealt more kindly, its three exquisite pillars of Parian marble still standing unmolested. Near the tribune from which Marc Antony harangued the people on the 20th March, B.C. 44, Augustus erected a temple in honour of the deified triumvir. To-day a heap of stones tells where this building rose. Turning to the south, upon our right we discover the celebrated temple of Vesta, or rather its site, and close by some little mounds of brick-work map out, in a more or less indefinite manner, the ground plan of the Atrium Vesta, the convent of the Vestal virgins. A beautiful palace must have been this species of nunnery. Its large court was surrounded by a double arcade, the columns of which were of green cipollino marble below, and red breccia corallina above. Here were fountains and flowers, so that like their modern sisters, the Vestals of ancient times discovered behind seemingly uncompromising walls a life still lovely, though dreamier, and with more quiet joys. The dwelling rooms of the priestesses opened into a large, square apartment, approached by steps in the second division of the palace. Behind the court have been discovered remains of a kitchen, mill, and bath, while surrounding the atrium proper was the residence of the Pontifices Maximi. Here dwelt Julius Cæsar, as Pontifex Maximus, and here were performed the ceremonies in connection with the *féta* of the Bona Dea, a goddess whose real name was never known to man, "which," says a Frenchman, "fait honneur à la discrétion des femmes." Eluding the vigilance of her mother-in-law, Aurelia, it was into this palace and to these mysteries that Pompeia, Cæsar's wife, admitted her lover Clodius in the guise of a woman; and later, from here that the triumvir's last wife, Calpurnia, rushed forth to meet his dead body.

Now, if you will climb with me out of this grave-like labyrinth where we have been wandering, we may take the road skirting the base of the Palatine Hill, and, walking southward, pass under the arch of Titus to the Coliseum.

I sometimes wonder how we should look upon this magnificent pile—nay, on much in Italy, if Byron and other poets to whom this land was so dear had never lived. Truly, as we stand, gazing awe-struck upon this ruin—so infinitely grand and melancholy—the vision becomes the reality, and this, the reality, the dream. We care little to torture our brain with dates and hard facts; indeed, prefer the heart-rending memories too apt to haunt the spot should be unawakened. And why call forth the gorgeous, blood-thirsty past? Heaven knows, it has paid its crimes dearly enough. No, let us pity, rather, and draw, like Nature, even over scenes of ghastliest deeds, the green mantle of forgiving hope!

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AUSTRO-HUNGARY AND THE BALKAN CONFEDERATION.

THE following article on the present position of European politics has been carefully prepared from one of a series by Sir Charles Dilke in the *Fortnightly Review*. The date of the original publication happened strangely enough to be that of the expiration of that compromise between Austria and Hungary as to customs duties, which lies at the root of the financial position of the Dual Monarchy. Both halves of the Empire have now adopted the measures which the Austro-Hungarian Government considered necessary. The fortifications of Cracow are complete, the militia has been armed, and war preparations made, the absence of which in the past was caused solely by the difficulties of the financial position.

To obtain an authoritative view of the situation of this Empire is by no means easy. Strong as may be the Austrian and Hungarian statesmen in power, they are compelled by the difficulties of the position of the Dual Monarchy to use temporising language, and avoid anything like frankness of speech or expression of real intention. Though Buda-Pest has at least one powerful journal in the *Pester Lloyd*, and though Vienna is, of all the capitals of Europe, essentially the newspaper capital, there is a very marked difference in tone between the newspapers of the Austrian and