

them? What madness tempted them to stay? How the water surges! Oh, God! for only five minutes' cessation of this tumult, only one! On and on, there is no turning back now; it is life or death. She looks again. Is she any nearer? Her breath comes short and thick. A ringing is in her ears. She fancies amid the uproar she can hear her heart hammer at her ribs. The island! Is it near or far? Where is the island now? She is nearly blinded, choked, deafened, but she hears, ah yes! she hears the yodel she taught him on the mountain. New strength fires her. He has seen her, recognized her, welcomed her, as well he may if ever she reached there. Clear and shrill she sends her voice out, but it is blown back to her by the angry wind. Is she any nearer? Ah, yes, little by little—she can make out human forms now. They have a speaking-trumpet. That is her name she hears; he is encouraging her. What is it he says? How frantically he shouts!

"Look out! Look out!" For what?

She knows the next moment, for a mass of dark objects is bearing down upon her. Heavens! What is it? A vast wave lifts them high above her head, and she desperately forces the boat about. "Back! Back! Back!" she hears. She might as well try to back in the throat of hell! She dimly wonders is hell any more horrible than this. A shock, a crash, a sickening feeling of numbness, and the huge timber-laden wave passes on, leaving her floating but helpless. A jam of logs had caught on the submerged end of the island and were breaking loose; every wave was charged with them, bearing desperately down on her, she was crushed, stunned already, but if one struck the boat sideways, ah then, her hope and theirs was gone.

Another wave higher than the first even. "God!" burst in a shriek from her lips. "Spare the boat! Crush me, but let the boat reach him!" and her cry rang shrilly over the tumult.

Another shock, a pause, and the boat rocks frightfully, but rights itself again. Still the rower keeps the oars though almost useless now. She feels paralyzed, dazed, helpless. Are all her limbs crushed that she cannot move them, and the island so near now? Ah! one minute more! She sets her teeth and forces her oars into the water. Vain, vain, she is indeed helpless. Her hurt is mortal.

Ah! brave swimmer! She sees how he has ventured out through the surf to reach her, but the waves toss him back like a ball. Again he dashes in, and again a surging mountain of waters tears at his senses, but he struggles on. There! there! at hand! high on that wave is the boat. He has it almost now. Thank God! Ah! the timbers again. Mercy God! so nearly saved! He has it now; he has reached her. "You forgive? I am dying!" and the avalanche descends, crash! a hell of bursting waters, and over all the moon still shines in glory!

#### A PUBLIC READER.

SHAMROCKS were better for an Irish queen;  
Yet, being otherwhere than shamrocks grow  
One deems it not inadequate to throw  
The poor best blossom from one's little green  
Before the feet of her who walks serene  
Upon her highway, passing to and fro  
Among her people, teaching them to know  
What wise, grave, true, and sweet things life may mean.

No more upon our baser bodily sight  
There breaks the rapture of the brooding Dove;  
But here and there are teachers touched with might,  
And filled with gifts, devoted from above;  
We owe them duty, and they bring us light,  
And healing leaves of Faith and Hope and Love.

ALBERT E. S. SMYTHE.

#### CHRISTMAS IN ROME.

CHRISTMASTIDE came to Rome in sunshine, the mild rainy weather of the past few days lasting up to Christmas Eve, when the soft afternoon sunshine struggled out from the clouds, brightening more and more, until it ended in a deep-burning, fiery sunset over behind St. Peter's, that silhouetted the great dome in velvety blackness, against its glow.

But whether it were drizzling rain or sunshine seemed to make small difference to the holiday crowds that filled the streets; Americans and English loitering before the tempting jewellery shops of the Corso, or the Via Condotti, or bargaining for flowers, and great branches of holly, and eucalyptus in the Piazza d'Espagna; Italian mamas and papas, frantically investing in every manner of toy that the shops held.

Sala propounds the query: "Who stays at home and does the work, in Rome?" Certainly that query is not to be answered at this holiday season when all the world is astir, from the pale, sweet-faced Queen, in her carriage with the gorgeous red liveries, at the sight of which all the people uncover; or some portly Cardinal or Bishop, half hidden in the depths of one of the dingy Vatican carriages, with their long-tailed black horses; down to the raggedest little urchin, who has begged a two centessime bit with which to buy a tin trumpet on the steps of the Ara Coeli. All through the night one hears in the street the coming and going of those who attend at the mid-

night or earliest masses, and long before it is daylight on Christmas morning, the soft deep clang of the bells rises up from the city below one; the city that has kept its Christmas tide for more than eighteen hundred years; the city from which so many a dauntless martyr soul has gone up to the Christ Child for whom it died.

The clear saffron sky deepens in colour, St. Peter's dome has caught the rosy glow, the Christmas sun has risen over Rome. All day long it shines in true Roman splendour, gilding the city domes, and the Piucian pines, and flooding every open square and flight of steps, to the great joy of the loungers thereon; flashing sparks of light from every soaring fountain; and lighting up the Italian tricolours that float above the Capitol, as we stand looking up at it from the foot of the Ara Coeli steps; the tricolour, green with the colour of hope for a fair Italian future, red as the blood of those who have died for her liberty. That those last are not forgotten by the Italians is testified by the great wreath of fresh laurels that has been hung around the neck of the bronze statue of Rienzi, the last Roman Tribune, which stands here by the steps where he fell. These steps, as well as the square below, are to-day covered with a moving mass of people. A mass, brilliant with the red and yellow handkerchiefs of the country women, or the blue and red uniforms of the soldiers.

From the moving throng come those discordant noises, which the parents of large families are accustomed to associate with Christmas time, for all the sides of the hundred steps are lined with vendors of toys, among which penny trumpets and whistles and a variety of such instruments of torture predominate.

We follow the crowd up to the great doorway, only open on high festivals, and pause on the portico to look around at the baskets of quaint wares for sale.

Here are endless strings of rosaries, and rows of bright chromos of the Madonna, and wax figures of the Christ Child, in little straw baskets, as well as penny dolls, dressed in the beloved colours, red, white, and green. Here are great slabs of yellow polenta, and slices of a sort of cold plum-pudding which looks about as digestible as the old Roman bricks of the wall beside us.

Standing on this open portico of the church, we looked down on the great square of the Capitol, and the beautiful slope leading up to it, on the stately marble forms of the Great Twin Brethren, and on that noblest of all statues of the noblest of all those who groped their way to good, in the twilight of faith, the great bronze, mounted figure of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

It is of him that Arnold writes: "He is one of those consoling and hope-inspiring marks which stand forever to remind our weak and easily-discouraged race how high human goodness and perseverance have once been carried, and may be carried again."

It is hard, standing here, amongst all the Christmas-tide movement and noise, to realize that, of all spots in Rome, the concentrated associations of the old vanished world, here throng the thickest with the new one that was to replace it.

It was up the site of these very steps that Julius Cæsar climbed, on his knees, after his first triumph, and that the procession of many another Roman conqueror swept to theirs, in the great Temple of Jupiter, built by Romulus in the dawn of Rome. The very words Ara Coeli are a link with that earlier faith, for, according to the legend, it was in that Temple of Jupiter, where the Ara Coeli Church now stands, that on a certain day of the month of October, in the fifty-sixth year of his reign, the Emperor Octavianus Augustus, who had come to sacrifice to Jupiter and to find out who would be his successor to the reign of the world, was met in the portico of the Temple by a venerable matron with a child in her arms, whom she ordered him to worship as He who would shortly come down from Heaven to rule the world.

Augustus, awed by the Heavenly vision, built here an altar, dedicated to the Son of God, and to this present day there stands, under the high altar of the church, an ancient one with the inscription "Ara Primogeniti Dei," which gives its name to the church.

If only a legend, what a touching one it is, linking that dark pagan world, reaching out after knowledge, with the reign of the Christ Child whom we this day worship. How, far more than any Bambino, it makes this the Christmas church of Rome.

It was here, sitting in the quiet church while the monks chanted vespers, that the first idea came to Gibbon of his history of the decay of that Roman world, the ruins of which lay so thickly around him. The crowds are thickening so, that it is rather an effort to lift the heavy leather curtain, and to enter the church. And for a second one pauses, bewildered in the rich gloom, by the soft movement and murmur of the crowd. With every lifting of the curtain, a long ray of sunlight enters, drawing blue lines on the haze of the incense, and striking out a ray of light from the silver lamps before a shrine, or from the bright metal of some Carbonari's sword hilt.

Up at the high altar, vespers are being sung by the priest in white festal array, but the service attracts no great crowd; and the soft snatches of music come through the echoing of footsteps as people come and go about the church.

One corner near the door is thronged by a crowd around a low platform where the children make their Christmas recitals. How the fathers and mothers press in and smile and nod to each other and hold up their babies to see their brother or sister perched on their proud

eminence. How interested the whole crowd is in the performance. The children are all, apparently, of the working classes, but there is no shyness or awkwardness about them.

The smaller ones show a delightful simplicity and solemnity; the elder girls with difficulty conceal a smirk of intense satisfaction, but all speak their parts with fluency, and repeat their evidently well-drilled gestures with more or less grace.

One plump partridge-shaped little maiden of about five raises a soft ripple of laughter by the energy with which she wriggles herself from side to side, with the motion of a Newfoundland pup shaking off the water from its sides.

One slim, almost Jewish-looking girl, all but rises into tragedy by the pathos with which, with outstretched arms and upraised eyes, she depicts the woes of the Virgin. But the greatest throng of all is over at the side chapel, where the Bambino which gives its fame to the church lies in state in the Presipio. It takes time and patience to get near, but, even over the heads of the crowd, we can see the arch of ivy, which frames the brightly-lighted representation of the Manger. The landscape and clouds thronged with adoring angels are arranged in wings like a small theatre, and the perspective is not bad that leads up to the life-sized wooden figures of the foreground.

St. Joseph stands with a lily in his hand; groups of shepherds and peasants kneel, or offer baskets of fruit and flowers, to the central seated figure of the Virgin Mary, on whose knees, one mass of sparkling gems encrusting its whole surface, lies the far-famed Bambino. The faithful pretend to see in its tiara-crowned wooden countenance a deep solemnity and mysterious meaning, but I must say that I can perceive in it nothing more than the stolid smirk, common to any row of wax dolls in a window.

I had inspected it more closely before this as a tourist, before whose face all things open, but to the populace it is only visible at this season, and how they throng and press to gaze at it, and how, above all, the children swarm.

Fathers hold up their little ones to kiss their hands to the Bambino; small boys cluster on the vantage ground of the knees of the great seated statue of Pope Paul III., holding on by arm, outstretched to bless, which looks as though it had been polished by generations of such climbers. This Bambino is one of the most sacred objects to the Roman populace, and its history is implicitly believed in.

Carved by a Franciscan monk, in Jerusalem, of wood from the Mount of Olives; painted, in its present gaudy hues, by angels as it slept; when ship wrecked on its way to Rome, floating safely over the waves to Leghorn; arousing the people of Rome, on its arrival there, to an ecstasy of devotion; healing the sick, whom it visited in its coach, when stolen by fraud. Returning at night, with ringings of the bells, and knocking at the great portal of the church, to its chosen sanctuary, having its own household, and wardrobe, and casket of gems, enough to build a foundling hospital—such is the Bambino of the Ara Coeli.

When we have seen enough of the recitals and the Presipio, we sit down in a corner to watch the crowd—that varied, fascinating, Roman crowd of which one never tires. Coming and going are stately Roman "grandes dames," followed by their children, with brightly dressed nurses, their heads decked with silver daggers, and long gay ribbon streamers.

Here are clanking, stalwart officers of the Queen's Guard, in their silver helmets, and long, full, dove-coloured cloaks; and the Besagliere of the northern mountains, with their nodding cock's plumes; and the good-looking Carbonari in their handsome black and red uniform.

Wondering, delighted peasants, from the campagna stand, gaping about; the men in their rough blue homespun and slouching felt hat; the women, with handkerchiefs and shawls of innumerable bright tints. Above all, there seems to abound a collection of every religious garb to be found in Rome. Black-clad priests, brown-robed, bare-footed friars, each one firmly grasping his Mother Gamp umbrella; the nuns of the Perpetual Adoration, in their peculiar white and blue dress; white and black Dominicans, the "hounds of the Lord," with a keener, more intellectual type of face. All these are to be seen among the crowd, as well as innumerable files of students. St. Andrew's Scotch students in their dull blue cassocks, the Irish in their black and green, the German in their vivid scarlet—all these, gathered from many lands to have their young minds cast in the mould of Rome, are here to-day.

It is a crowd that one can watch without tiring for longer than one thinks, and when we left the church we found that the sun had sunk in a yellow glow, and the Ave Maria bells were pealing from every tower.

Other sights and churches there were to see and do, but this, the wonderful old Ara Coeli, has remained the most characteristic bit of our Christmas Day in Rome.

ALICE JONES.

Rome, December 31, 1890.

PROFESSOR KIRCHOFF, of Halle, in an article speaks of the anxiety with which scientific men looked for the meeting of the International Conference on degree measurement, for observations seemed to show that a decrease in latitude was in process, implying an alteration in the direction of the earth's axis. The fluctuation observed is probably due to a minute oscillation caused by some change in the internal mass of the planet.—*English Mechanic*.