

ROME'S GREATEST MONUMENT.



ROME can boast of many wonders. No other city can compare with her as to the number and finish of her monuments. Tradition, and the filial respect of all Catholics for the Pope, have consecrated the custom of paying the first visit in the Eternal City, to the tomb of the Apostles Peter and Paul. But the shadow of St. Peter's ever spreads itself like a royal mantle over the Coliseum; it always points with holy pride to the arena, where the first Christians, sealed the faith in the ruby characters of their blood.

The word Coliseum is but a corruption of the term Colosseum, by which the huge pile of buildings was designated at a period that cannot well be determined. Nardini and other antiquaries have supposed that it acquired the name of Colosseum from the statue of Nero, of colossal size, placed in front of it. But there is no evidence whatever of this fact, and the other opinion is much more probable. Certain it is, however, that its sparkling waters were darkened by the shadow of Nero's great statue. Colossal in size, it was chiselled out of the finest marble, and it reached the imposing height of one hundred feet. The summit was surmounted by a statue of the Emperor, and the head of the proud pretender to divine honors was surrounded by the nimbus. The Neronian Pool was undoubtedly one of the chief attractions of the golden palace, and it was usually the scene of naval fights and exhibitions. The natural advantages of the site were admirably utilized for this purpose, and the attentive archeologist of to-day has solved the problem of its actuality. At an easy distance on the slope of Mount Cœlius in the direction of St. John Lateran a vast volcanic upheaval is met with, which according to the savants in the matter was in former times the site of a spacious reservoir. The water was brought hence from the Claudian aqueduct and by a simple catenation of sluices, it reached the amphitheatre. By this means its velocity was regulated and such was its volume

that a few minutes sufficed to fill the whole arena. This arrangement still lasted in the days of the great persecutions, and whenever the gladiatorial combats became too revolting to gaze upon, whenever the soil literally reeked with human blood and became too strong even for the bestial Roman fury, the flood-gates were opened, the strong current carried in its rapid embrace the mingled blood of triumphant Christian martyr and despairing infidel. A few minutes sufficed to restore the marble flooring to its virginal purity, and a layer of sand removed all vestige of the bloody carnage with which it was so lately strewn.

The Coliseum was first projected by Augustus, but the foundations were not laid until the time of Vespasian. To the conqueror of Jerusalem was reserved the honor of bringing it to its completion. Titus employed in this work the sons of Abraham, whom he had led captives from Jerusalem. History relates that no less than twelve thousand of these unfortunates were killed in its construction. Singular destiny of a singularly chosen people. The stiff-necked Jew that refused to submit to the sweet commands of Jehovah put on the yoke of his Roman master and became a slave. Fallen away from its own divinely bestowed grandeur, the nation that produced the Temple of Zion, became the architect and mason of the greatest monuments of antiquity, of the pyramids in the East, of the Coliseum in the West?

From a medal struck on the occasion we learn that it was dedicated and opened for the first time by Titus in the eighth year of his consulship, and eightieth of the Christian era. Cassiodorus tells us that the dedication festivities lasted twenty days, and that no less than five thousand wild beasts and ten thousand gladiators took part. The Coliseum forms an immense oval of about sixteen hundred and forty feet in circumference and about 157 in height. The most natural way to form an idea of its immense proportions is to make the outer circuit. The first peculiarity that attracts attention are the foundations. The or-