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ST. PETER'S AT ROME.

Two hundred and seventy-seven years ago—on the 25th November, the Feast of St. Catharine, 1626,—the Church, or basilica of St. Peter's, in Rome, was dedicated. Hundreds of pens, in verse and in prose, have described Rome and St. Peter's, and yet that mighty structure, the monument to Angelo's genius, and the most glorious temple ever raised by the hands of man to the glory of God, has never ceased to furnish inspiration. It was only the other day that we met with a glowing and worthy pen picture of the Eternal City and of the greatest Church on earth, from the pen of Geale, a graphic and enthusiastic writer. So appropriate does it seem, at this present juncture, and so admirable is it in all its details, that we make no apology for inserting it in full, in our columns this week. It is not often that we meet with the oldest of subjects treated in the freshest of manners, and when we do come upon something really new in the line of description, upon well-worn subjects, we feel that we have a novelty. It is thus that Geale writes of Rome, and especially of the great basilica:—

"Rome, imperial Rome—for she still looks imperial—the dome of St. Peter's, the mole of Adrian and the yellow Tiber, burst upon my view; reflecting, with their own, the glory of an Italian sunset. What a tide of reflections occupy the mind—what emotions stir the heart on first beholding Rome. There is not only grandeur in the sight, but in the thought that we behold her; we feel as if ennobled by the destiny which has brought us hither to ponder amidst scenes so renowned and sacred, 'Rome, still seated on her seven hills, stretched away before me; the city—the vicissitudes of whose fortunes involve the history of our race; the fruitful mother of heroes; the imperial mistress of the world; exalted by the loftiest achievements of valor and patriotism; and adorned by the most varied and consummate genius; till, degenerate and self-enthralled, she became the victim of the sanguinary crimes and lust of power which she herself had engendered. No other city on earth has been the theatre of such events, or suggests the same association. Who can behold it for the first time unmoved? The statesman, the philosopher, and man of letters, all alike regard it with the deepest interest, although with the feelings which belong to their different characters; but it is the devout and believing in infallible Rome who behold her with one common feeling of enthusiastic veneration, and enter her gates with exultations as the 'Holy City,' hallowed by the blood of martyrs, and the residence of the fisherman and his successors. 'But let us turn and behold the Colosseum—the enormous building erected by Vespasian to commemorate the destruction of Jerusalem. . . . But what were the entertainments for which this vast amphitheatre was destined? The heart shudders at the recollection, and the Christian derives another awful confirmation of the desperate wickedness and depravity of unconverted man. . . . The Colosseum was therefore erected, and Christian persecution and constancy soon furnished them with abundant victims to glut their ferocity. Here came, twice a day, we are told, the most distinguished, not only of the men, but of the matrons and daughters of Rome; and so terrible was the butchery on some of the great Roman holidays that it required aqueducts to supply the water necessary to cleanse the arenas after these bloody exhibitions. 'When wearied with the mortal strife between man and man, the ruler of these terrific shows gave the signal, and man was seen contending with the wild beasts of the forest. We would fain turn away incredulously from such recitals; but the testimony of the Roman historians, and the very ruins themselves, leave us no room to doubt of these bloody scenes. Never was the faith and constancy of the first Christian martyrs displayed and tried in an ordeal so terrific. Their inhuman persecutors, amazed by a fortitude which they could not appreciate, attributed their devotion to madness; for they could not understand why men should prefer death to a denial of the truth, when, like Pontius Pilate, they were themselves ignorant even of what it was.' St. Peter's, the noblest temple ever raised by human hands, to which 'Rome's marvel was a cell,' is thus richly and beautifully described; how magnificent is the approach to

it—that grandest of colonnades, the noble piazza, and its obelisk, and gushing fountains. . . . There is a pervading and wonderful harmony has combined the merit of attention to particulars, with the most vast and sublime conceptions that architect ever formed. Every effect produced accords with the aspiring design, which called this grandest of all earthly temples into existence. The colossal genius of Michael Angelo towers exultingly to the skies in that majestic dome, which seems built for everlasting. There the spectator, whose mind has become expanded while pacing those glorious aisles, has no difficulty in at once comprehending that, in St. Peter's, the founders designed the metropolitan temple of the Christian world. This was the ambition which laid its foundation stone, and which has actuated every succeeding Pontiff in completing or adorning it."

On the spot where the Prince of the Apostles had been crucified, Anacletus, Bishop of Rome, erected an oratory. In 306, Constantine the Great built a basilica on the same spot. In 1450 Pope Nicholas V. commenced a new building in the place of Constantine's, which, with changes, was continued till it was dedicated on November 18, 1626—a period of construction of one hundred and seventy-five years. During this long period forty-three Sovereign Pontiffs had sat upon the throne of St. Peter, superintending the construction of the cathedral church of the world.

For hours before the pilgrim reaches the Eternal City he sees the great dome rising into the blue; when he reaches his journey's end it towers above the roofs and belfries and minor domes, reminding him of Coleridge's great line on Mont Blanc: "But thou, most awful form, rises from forth thy silent sea of pines, how silently."

When he enters the mighty Pantheon, standing in perfect preservation to-day after centuries—he is told, and truly, that in designing St. Peter's dome Michael Angelo's genius had seized this marvel of pagan architecture, lifted it two hundred feet in the air, and set it as a crown upon the cathedral of the bridge of St. Angelo, passes Hadrian's mausoleum and down the silent street of Santo Spirito, all his reading and all his imagination leave him unprepared for the magnificence of the vision that bursts upon him.

He stands in the great Piazza of St. Peter's, Bernini's giant colonnade opens out before him on either side, on the right and left are two glorious fountains shooting skyward their torrents of spray through which the sun shines in prismatic hues, in the centre is the mightiest obelisk that the Pharaohs ever raised, before which the pious Roman lifts his hat in veneration for the relic of the True Cross by which it is surmounted—and behind them all is the great front of St. Peter's, the mightiest and most imposing structure ever raised by man.

Every pillar supporting the arch-mitrave might, if hollowed out, conceal a small army of men. The vestibule is a vast hall, nearly four hundred feet long, and it is recorded that visitors have seen it and departed, thinking they had seen St. Peter's. But opposite the exterior entrance, between the pillars of the vestibule, are two mighty doors of bronze, taken from the old St. Peter's, and exquisitely worked by Christian artists when Christian art was in its heyday.

"Enter: its grandeur overwhelms thee not." It is strange, amazing—almost disappointing. This is not the St. Peter's you looked for. Here are no glories of stained glass; nothing of the veneration of age, of the "dim religious light" of Gothic temples, nothing to impress you with a sense of vastness. The Baldachino over the Basilican altar under the dome, looks small. You have a general sense of brightness, of sunshine, of solidity. You take in at a glance the arched roof in white and gold over your head, the marble floor at your feet, the vari-colored walls on either side, the great chair altar in the apse; there is a sound of singing, but it is music "distantly sweet;" there are others besides yourself in the church, and you see them, but you do not notice them until you approach more closely.

You cannot analyze your sensations. You are not transported with admiration as you expected—hoped, perhaps—but you have a feeling which is in a sense the opposite of that expressed by Lord Byron. Your mind is not expanded by the genius of the spot—you know you are in St. Peter's in the body, but you know that your mind has not grasped its magnificence.

There is a holy water font—a shell-shaped basin in yellow marble supported by two little cherubs. When you have come close the little cherubs have become gigantic figures, and the basin is almost a pond. At the pedestal of the Baldachino you notice some design in bronze at about

the level of your eyes. You approach to examine it, and lo! every step you take the design rises higher and higher—it is some twelve feet from the ground. Your eyes are becoming accustomed to the magnificent scale on which everything here is contrived.

You are beginning at last to see the beauties of those pillars of priceless marble, the heroic mold of those statues of saints and popes, the exquisite art of those everlasting pictures in mosaic, any one of which would take almost a century in the making; you feel the sacredness within that circle of lamps that burn forever around "The Confession," where repose the bodies of Saints Peter and Paul; the great dome is over your head, and now it is like the vault of heaven itself; the singing in the canon's chapel peals out more joyously, more triumphantly. At a future time you will examine the details—to-day you are amply content to know that you are beginning to know St. Peter's. It is worthy of Rome, the seat of ancient art; it is worthy of Michael Angelo and Raphael and Bramante, the princes of modern art; it is worthy of the Popes, the vicars of Christ, and it is worthy of the Catholic Church.

EDUCATED LAYMEN WANTED.

Archbishop Ireland, while on a visit to Cleveland, O., visited St. Ignatius College, and addressed a few words of encouragement to the students, who listened to him with the greatest attention and interest. After showing them the great privilege they enjoy in being able to attend a college conducted by Catholic priests and religious who devote their lives to the cause of higher education, he exhorted his young listeners to fix their aims as high as possible.

America, he said, is the land of opportunities, and nowhere is success so easily obtained by an aspiring young man as in our own country. Certainly, there are those that fail, there are those that do not rise, but in most cases it is their own fault.

We Catholics, on the whole, have been too modest in our aspirations; the highest and best ought not to be too high and too good for us.

We want our young men to vie with the first in the land. We wish to see a greater number of Catholics in the councils of the nation and in the halls of learning.

The Church of America needs priests, but she needs also educated laymen, and at present there is perhaps a greater need for the latter than for the former.

THE PRIEST AND LABOR.

Mitchell, the well known American labor leader, says an exchange, knows the priests of the Catholic Church sufficiently well to pass upon their attitude toward the laborer in a way that entitles his words to respect. He writes: "With reference to the sympathy of the Catholic clergy, you must bear in mind that over 90 per cent. of the miners are Catholics, penetrated with a traditional fealty to the Church that is as chivalrously tender as the love which a son gives a devoted mother. This could not be unless the priest was an important factor in the life of the people. That he is, is unquestioned."

Out of this large sentiment of helpfulness and spiritual guidance there issues a sympathy on the part of the Catholic clergy for the aspirations and the struggles for wider proposals of the labor movement. I have known only two priests in my whole experience who were not friendly to the miners in their battle for better conditions. And these men were not representative of the type that spells widened influence for the Catholic conception of life.

The priest knows the workingman. He does not look at him from the quiet carpeted seclusion of a study where he browses over academic and anaemic discourses on the condition of labor. His sympathy is a well-spring of living waters. It is prompted by intimate contact. It is not a sterile devotion to an unreal workingman conjured up by the waving of many phrases."

JEWS IN NEW YORK.

It is estimated that there are 675,000 Jews in New York city, or one in every four of the population. If the Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe continues at its volume during the last year, the Jews will soon be the largest foreign element in the population of New York.

Our Curbstone Observer ON GHOSTS.

THIS is a refreshing, or, at least, a sensational kind of subject. It was suggested to me by reading an account of some pretended spiritualistic manifestations, in a certain house on Ste. Elizabeth street, in this city. The story told savors very much of the old-style tales of haunted houses, with their cracking stairs, slamming doors, strange noises, and various other unusual and unnatural exhibitions. As far as the Ste. Elizabeth street case is concerned, I have no information to give and no opinion to express; I merely refer to it because it was the cause of my thinking of the subject. As a rule, in all such cases, sooner or later, natural and very natural causes are discovered for the disturbances so caused. But, apart from all that, there is no doubt that persons of a certain nervous temperament are inclined to believe in supernatural manifestations, and often to actually have faith in the very offsprings of their too vivid imaginations. Without attempting to enter into the considerations of this subject, from a physical point of view, one might be permitted to ask if it is possible that ghosts should appear to the living. There are hundreds of honest and devout people who have an abiding faith in ghosts, and even who claim to have seen the spirits of the dead. I am not of those who would doubt their seriousness, but I am confident that, like in the cases of haunted houses, they could, if they tried, find some very natural solution for each of those ghost-problems.

WHAT ARE GHOSTS?—This is the question. As I understand it, a ghost, in the common acceptance of the term, is the spirit of a dead person that returns to earth to hold communications with the living, or to frequent the scenes familiar to it in life-time. Taking this to be an explanation of what people call ghosts, I am inclined to analyze the question. As a rule, the appearance of a ghost is associated with some great crime, or the scene of some mysterious death. Last year I read of the ghost of a man who had been killed, a number of years before, in a certain house. It was said that the house was surely haunted, and that the troubled spirit moaned and groaned to people had been frightened by this spirit, but none had ever been harmed by it. Let us take this case as a basis. We will suppose that the man in question had been murdered in that house. As soon as he was killed his soul certainly went to eternity. Now it went to one of three places: heaven, hell, or purgatory. Let us say that the murdered man went to heaven. If so, why should his soul, that is in perfect bliss, return to haunt scenes of misery? Is it likely, even if God were willing to grant such a privilege, that the soul would seek to come back to earth and amuse itself in the questionable occupation of frightening timid people and of haunting places that could only be associated with misery? Not at all. If he is in heaven, he is going to remain there, without a doubt. Let us now suppose that his soul is in hell. Out of that place there is no escape. For what purpose would a soul be permitted, to return to earth from the region of the damned? For no practical purpose that we can conceive. Besides we do not believe that God would permit a soul to escape from the infernal regions to simply go about scaring people who are still on earth. Now we come to the third case—suppose the soul of that man is in Purgatory. It may certainly happen that the souls of the faithful departed may be allowed to suggest to the faithful on earth that their needs, in prayers, or other means for their relief. But it is not at all probable, not even conceivable that the Almighty would allow such childish, such foolish antics as are attributed in general to what people call ghosts. Certainly the souls of the departed can return to earth; certainly living people have had visions of saints, have seen demons, and have beheld the sufferers of Purgatory and have communicated with them. To deny this would be to deny miracles, miraculous manifestations, saintly visions, and all those matters that belong to the history of revelation. But there is a vast

difference between these communications and the fantastic and commonplace stories of ghosts that amuse themselves making noises, annoying people, opening and shutting doors, playing on instruments, muttering unintelligible things, and in general making fools of people in manners the most absurd and vulgar. Ghosts, in this latter sense, I have no faith in; not only have no faith in them, but I, at once, have my suspicions of any person who pretends to having seen them. Such persons are either designing knaves, unsound of mind, or shattered in nerves. This is my humble conclusion after years of experience on the curbstone.

AN EXPERIENCE.—In this connection I will relate a personal experience. It happened twenty-three years ago, and I have never since been able to solve the matter to my own satisfaction. However, I am positive that there was nothing either supernatural, or preter-natural about my experience. I am strongly under the impression that my story is due to some over-straining of the nervous system; but ninety-nine persons in every hundred would say, under the same circumstances, that they had seen a ghost, or that they were haunted by a spirit from beyond the grave.

It was about ten at night, in the month of December, 1880, I was seated in my room studying very hard for an examination that I had to pass a couple of days before Christmas. I had been working very hard, and mostly at night, for about two weeks. A companion, a student also, whose room was opposite mine, had been working with me during the term, had allowed me to use a couple of his books, for the purposes of the coming examination. During the last days of November he had become ill, and finally had to go to the hospital. He told me before leaving that he would come for his books on his return. He was in the habit of coming in and going out without any ceremony, not even knocking at the door; and I acted in the same familiar manner with him. On that particular night, as I said, I was intent upon my work and thinking very little about anything else. I had been reading steadily for a time; then I turned to take up my pen to write some notes, when I felt that some one had come into the room. I just glanced up, and I saw my sick friend come in, pass into my bed-room—to get his books, as I supposed, for he knew they were there—and then quietly and apparently with a smile, pass out again. The only thing that, for a second flashed upon me, was that I did not notice the books in his hand. I have since often asked myself why I did not speak to him; but I suppose it was simply because I was busy and that he did not address me. About eleven o'clock I turned off the gas and went into my bed-room to undress. In so doing I noticed the books on the little table, just as I had left them there. But this did not cause me a thought, for I was very sleepy and weary. I soon was sound asleep. The next morning I arose at seven, and as was our custom went down to the general morning prayers that were said in a little chapel on the first flat. Before beginning the prayers, the director, who was a priest, said that we were requested to remember in our prayers the soul of Mr. G.—one of our companions, who had died during the night at the hospital. Imagine my feelings on hearing this announcement. After breakfast I went to the director and told him of my experience. He looked grave, smiled a little, but did not pass any remark. From that day till this I have never been able to find out whether the director thought I was humbugging or believed me to be a little "touched in the head." No more have I ever been able to explain to myself the fact of having seen that young man come into my room on that night. If I remember rightly, and I have every good reason to remember well, he seemed dressed in a grey tweed suit which he had used all fall. Now that suit was in his room, had not been taken to the hospital with him; if, then, I had really seen him, how could he have had that suit on? This little fact alone shows me that I was laboring under a delusion of the mind, due possibly to over-exertion. I have even thought, since, that it may have been during that moment, when the announcement of his death was made in the morning, that my mind instantaneously flashed back a few hours, and created for itself the fancied recollection of a something that did not happen the night before. Still, there was my examination of his books before retiring to bed. But what is the use of speculating? Twenty odd years have since gone, and I am no wiser to-day than I was then on the subject. All I know is that these are facts, and that, still, I did not see a ghost.

The Immaculate Conception.

(By a Regular Contributor.)

Before another issue of our paper the Church will have celebrated the forty-ninth anniversary of the promulgation of the glorious dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was on the 8th December, 1854, that Pius IX. of immortal memory, surrounded by the Sacred College of Cardinals, in the midst of the Church's Council, proclaimed to the world that the olden dogma of the Immaculate Conception was an article of faith about which there could be no further question. Next year the half-century celebration of that loveable feast will be on a gigantic scale. It had been one of the brightest dreams of the closing years of Leo XIII., to have that event made worthy of such a grand dogma and of the Church that has always taught that glorious and consoling truth. In the plans of Divine Providence the great Leo was destined to live to behold the realization of his dream; but in his worthy successor the Church has a holy Pontiff, who will see that those designs are fully executed, while Leo enjoys the festival in the sanctuary of Heaven and in the Blessed presence of the Immaculate Mother of God.

All dogmas of the Church are fundamental, necessary, and important; consequently it would not be proper to establish either comparisons or contrasts between them. But we may be permitted to say, that of all the dogmas of Catholicity, none is more inspiring and elevating than this one of the Immaculate Conception. Through it the Catholic Church stands out alone amidst all the churches and creeds of earth, as the exemplification of the highest principles of chivalry and respect for womanhood, motherhood, and the association of woman in the great work of redemption. As it was through Adam's sin that the race fell, so was it through Christ's merits that the race was redeemed. In like manner, but in another degree, as it was through Eve's co-operation with Adam that death came into the world, so was it through Mary's co-operation with God—as "the handmaid of the Lord"—that life was brought to humanity and the gates of heaven were opened to the condemned children of men. As God raised Mary to the extraordinary dignity of being the mother, in a human sense, of His own Eternal Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, so did He raise all woman-kind, through Mary, to a level never before attained by the female portion of the human family. And the Catholic Church alone follows the example of God, and adheres to the wishes of Christ, in paying due honor to the Virgin Mother, the most glorious type of womanhood, and the most resplendent example of the motherhood to which the world owes so much.

In thus glorifying Mary the Church has established in an unshakable manner her claim to the recognition of the world as the only true representative and mouth-piece of Christ on earth. In the promulgation of this one dogma of the Immaculate Conception the Church has established, beyond all doubt, her right to be called the Pillar and Ground of Truth, her claim to the title of the Spouse of Christ. She alone can truly win the love of the Son, for she alone duly honors the mothers. Hence it is that this feast is unique in her annals and in those of all Christianity. There are other feasts, like that of Christmas, or that of Easter, in which various sections of Christianity may claim to participate. But on this occasion the Catholic Church is alone; she monopolizes this one feast; none other can address Mary as she can; none other can go to Christ, and say to Him: "O Lord, we ask Thee to bless us, to grant us grace, to bring us to Thee in Heaven, for the sake of Thy Beloved Mother, whom we honor even as Thou wouldst have us honor her." Hence it is that the Immaculate Conception raises the Catholic Church away above all others and causes her faithful children to participate in a heritage of grace and advocacy that is exclusively their own.

When a woman gives way to anger, she begs her own pardon with tears. Many women find happiness only when attending to the affairs of others.