

SAINT PETER'S AT ROME.

"—Pause, and be enlighten'd,—there is more
In such a survey than the sating gaze
Of wonder pleased, or awe which would adore
The worship of the place, or the mere praise
Of art and its great masters, who would raise
What former time, nor skill, nor thought could plan."

CHILDE HAROLD.

At a distance of twenty miles, when viewed from a ridge of the Latin or Sabine mountains, the Vatican, with its cross-surmounted dome, may be seen towering in majesty, above the city of the Seven Hills.

The believer and the infidel, the Christian and the Jew gaze upon it, if not with equal respect, at least with partial admiration; for the former feel within it the Deity's presence, while the latter must acknowledge that a nobler substitute for the fallen temple of Jerusalem, has never yet been raised to the God of Israel.

Gibbon and Forsyth, De Lalande and Stolberg, were enthusiastic in its praise. The faculties of Byron's capacious mind used to be enlarged, in contemplating so vast an edifice,—and even the sceptical Dupaty acknowledged that a visit to St. Peter's Church, sufficed to fix his thoughts on God and eternity.

What Catholic pilgrims have felt, and feel, at the sight of the "limina apostolorum," may be better imagined than described. As they pass over St. Angelo's statued bridge across the Tiber, skirt the imperial tomb of the Cæsars, and approach the Vesperian gardens, Olympian halls and the patriarchal Basilica of the Vatican, some allowance must assuredly be made for the glow of classic enthusiasm, as well as for the ardor of devotional excitement. That traveller, indeed, should not be envied, who can tread the Vatican's hallowed soil with indifference, or contemplate unmoved the shrines and altars raised as trophies of Christian victory in the grandest temple ever erected to the God of martyrs.

The obelisk, which rises to the height of 120 feet, in the centre of the piazza Vaticana, is surmounted by a bronze cross, which encloses an object worthy of peculiar religious respect, viz., a fragment of the identical wood, whereon Christ effected the world's ransom. On either side of the obelisk are two magnificent fountains, which throw up immense quantities of water. A flight of thirty-eight steps, leads to the exterior "threshold of the apostles." Traversing the outer porch, of no small dimensions, and entering the Basilica by one of its four eastern gates, the visitor beholds, as it were, a lake of marble at his feet. Towards the end of this smooth and expansive vista, are apparently more than a hundred golden lamps, like glistening stars in the distant horizon. After inspecting the aisles and nave of this sumptuous Basilica, even a critic will, doubtless, see cause for the poet's exclamation:—

"O Thou! of temples old, altars new,
Standest alone—with nothing like to thee—

Worthiest of God—the Holy, and the True;
Since Zion's desolation, when that He
Forsook His former city,—what could be
Of earthly structures in His honor piled,
Of a sublimer aspect? Majesty,
Power, glory, strength, and beauty, all are aisled
In this eternal ark of worship, undefiled."

CHILDE HAROLD.

The dome's magnificent conception, its double walls and massive foundations, together with thorough workmanship of details in the whole of the lofty superstructure, are solemnly grand and striking. What a prodigy of skill in the high embossed roof! An inclined plane or bridle road leads from the inner edifice aloft to the scattered habitations, which may be likened to a pensile city. To illuminate the outside cupola and *façade*, on a festal night, no less than 360 torch-bearers are employed in enkindling 4400 lamps. From afar it seems to hang suspended, like a transparent globe of lace-work, from the canopy of heaven!

The Vatican basilica may also be considered as a monumental proof how wonderful God is in His saints. In fact, this stupendous pile entombs the ashes of men who were once scornfully treated and vilipended as slaves; on the other hand, be it remarked, the "golden house" of their imperial murderer, on the Palatine, almost "like the baseless fabric of a vision," has left but a few vestiges of its "wreck" behind.

The "treble hundred triumphs" of consuls and Cæsars, with all the glories of the Capitol, have been surpassed by the exploits of unwarlike Pontiffs, whose sway is acknowledged in countries where the soaring eagles of pagan Rome never dared to venture.

An interior view of St. Peter's Church at sunset is a pleasing and impressive scene. Glancing between the columns of the Baldacchina, which canopies the High Altar, the pilgrim's eye catches, through a west painted window, the rays of departing light, just as they faintly illumine the four gigantic figures representing the four principal doctors of the Church upholding St. Peter's chair.

If the pilgrim likewise has a musical ear, as well as a taste for religious beauty, the delightful effect of such scenes will be enhanced by the soft dying strains of choral harmony, as they fall upon the senses during the chant of vespers; then also, if not too absorbed in pious reverie, he may observe the clouds of incense which, from the sanctuary's golden thuribles,

"Mounting veil the roof,
That glimmers like a pine-tree dimly view'd
Through Alpine vapors."

It is at such a time, and in such a place, that a devotee experiences something like what Coleridge says he felt on entering a Gothic cathedral: "I am filled with devotion and with awe; I am lost to the actualities that surround me, and my whole being expands into the infinite; earth and air, nature and art, all swell up into eternity; and the only sensible impression left me is that I am nothing."

Time nor space does not allow us here to unfold the wide