

with fast trotters. These contests are witnessed from stands, as in England, and are only prevented by falling snow. The pretty little horses are harnessed for trotting races singly to a low sleigh (in summer a drosky), driven by one man wearing the colours of the owner. Two of these start at once, in opposite directions, on a circular or oblong course marked out on a flat expanse of snow or ice. It is a picturesque sight, and recalls the pictures of ancient chariot races, on old vases and carved monuments.

The character of a nation can scarcely fail to be affected by the size of the country it inhabits, and a certain indifference to time and distance is produced by this circumstance. There is also a peculiar apathy as regards small annoyances and casualties, which is essentially orient. Whatever accident befalls the Russian of the lower orders, his habitual remark is, "Nitchino!" (It is nothing.)

The one preponderating impression produced by a short visit to Russia is an almost bewildering sense of its vastness, with an equally bewildered sense of astonishment at the centralisation of all government in the hands of the Emperor. This impression is perhaps increased by the nature of St. Petersburg. Long, broad streets, lit by electric light, huge buildings, public and private, large and almost deserted places or squares, all tend to produce the idea that the Russian nation is emerging from the long ages of Cimmerian darkness into which the repeated invasions of Asiatic hordes had plunged it, and that it is full of the energy and aspirations belonging to a people conscious of a great future in the history of mankind.

LETTER FROM ROME.

I LEFT you gazing at the strangest, the grandest ruin in Christendom. Not vainly attempting to realise or examine, we only stood before it open-eyed and awe-struck, murmuring to ourselves—"The Coliseum!" It was scarcely a time for thought, but rather for feeling. Nothing perhaps tends more to make sight-seeing a weariness than the misconceived idea of a duty which prompts us constantly to ferret out dates and facts when we should simply be drinking in the loveliness, and interrupts the most delicious of Byronic melodies by some dry-as-dust paragraph from a guide-book. Rightly to gain all the enjoyment certain scenes can offer, we should visit them at least half a dozen times, and there are not so many such spots on earth as to make the experiment impossible. We have experienced our first sensations of wonder, of infinite pleasure, at finding, as it were, before us in the flesh that melancholy phantom so long haunting favourite poem and romance. We now return to study.

Undeniably laudable as the modern spirit of investigation is, have you never a feeling of protest, never a longing desire they would not tell you all—the remains of a childish love for the marvellous? Nevertheless they will go on splitting up flowers. One must be resigned if something good is to come of it—only if they leave us nothing but wilting leaves—ah! that is another thing. Thus have they gone to work to dissect the Coliseum with the laudable aim, seemingly, of leaving no stone unturned. Once a building has fallen into ruin, what can we do better than let it stand "in ruinous perfection?" A clamp here, a prop there, are well, but is it not a cruelty to interrupt the kind work of Nature, who, striving to hide the ravages of time, spreads with gentle fingers her richest stuffs—her vine lace, her moss velvet—over mouldering arch and rugged pavement? There is an exquisite painting in the Vatican representing the tomb of the Virgin. Her friends are gazing into it, astounded at finding not a corpse, but a bed of loveliest flowers. So, till recent years, could we discover in this larger tomb of thousands verdure the most luxuriant. Like a child who in play crowns some sad, broken-nosed garden god with roses, Nature had decked out this mighty skeleton. But in 1872 excavations were made that have entirely annihilated the beauty of the Coliseum. These bring to light a labyrinth of subterranean passages which lay beneath the arena. Here were the dens of the wild beasts, and the pipes that served to bring in water for the miniature naval combats. The arena itself is believed to have been merely a movable wooden flooring, with trap doors much like our modern stage. No edifice in the world has undergone such vicissitudes, with none have the ages sported more cruelly. It has had the misfortune to outlive its time. They who have visited the Arena of Verona will be able to form an excellent idea of the interior of the Coliseum. For although the exterior is here and there almost perfect, the internal arrangements, owing to mediæval vandalism and modern investigation, are decidedly chaotic. Indeed I fear the time may come when our guides will have to say, like the player in the "Midsummer Night's Dream," "This is Wall."

If Rome has lost her temporal power, she is still the spiritual, nay, I would rather say, the moral mistress of the world. Better than a thousand homilies, these walks among her ruins. Cold exhortations to patience and suffering seem senseless and impuissant as we look back upon them now. It was no difficult matter to resist, nay, even to doubt, the smooth talk of sleek and comfortable conventionality. But this great, sombre figure, those eyeless sockets, those fleshless arms, this ruin, makes what before was fable to us, grave truth. Justice appears for once before us, not a marble effigy with sword and balance perched up somewhere near the sky, but walking among the people, writing in letters of light upon their hearts the names of those not only content to say, but to prove, that they were men.

The Coliseum was begun in A.D. 72, and finished in 80. It consists of four stories—the first, Doric; the second, Ionic; and the two last, Corinthian. The elliptical circumference of the building is nearly a third of a mile, and it could seat 87,000 spectators. These places were divided into four classes: the first for the Emperor, the senators, and the vestal virgins; the second, for the knights and tribunes; the third, for the common people; and the fourth for the soldiery. Almost frivolous these distinc-

tions, when every heart in that vast concourse beat with a common emotion—an emotion not altogether flattering to humanity.

With regard to the performances which took place in the Coliseum there seems to have been a little of everything, from the fanciful battles of dwarfs and cranes to naval combats, and from the butchery of a thousand beasts to the still more diverting slaughter of Christians. As years went on, gladiatorial combats—which excited the enthusiasm of ancient Romans more than any other kind of amusement—were abandoned "as inconsistent with Christianity" but wild beast fights continued. The nobles of the middle ages converted the Coliseum into a fortress, and the Popes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries employed it as a quarry! Sixtus V. proposed establishing a cloth factory here, and Clement XI. went so far as to use the building for the manufacture of saltpetre. In 1780 the Coliseum was consecrated to the Passion of Christ, and was thus saved from further demolition. Until 1872 small chapels stood around the arena, but these were removed by order of the present Government, and the hideous excavations, to which I have already alluded, made under the superintendence of Signor Rosa.

And now we move,

Within a bowshot where the Caesars dwelt,
And dwell the tuneless birds of night, amidst
A grove which springs through levelled battlements,
And twines its roots with the imperial hearths.

But ere we enter the Palatine, that "West End" of ancient Rome, we must glance at the Arch of Constantine and that of Titus, which, with the Arch of Septimus Severus, are by far the most beautiful in the city. The former stands quite close to the Coliseum, a little to the north-west. Its beautiful sculptures, illustrative of the life of Trajan, have given some the idea that it was built in honour of this emperor; but others, and rightly, believe, that these ornamentations were taken from the arch which once adorned the Forum of Trajan. Next to the erection of temples, such beautiful structures were perhaps the most flattering manifestations of appreciation. This arch has three passages. Around the summit are the statues of barbarian prisoners, while beautiful bas-reliefs are profusely sculptured over it. One of its eight Corinthian columns of *giallo-antico* was appropriated by Clement VIII. for a chapel in the Lateran. Merely to have read about ancient life and scenes, and that reading to have been rather of the red-and-black kind—histories of the most dazzling deeds, or darkest crimes, a compendium of wisest sayings, with a mixture of sarcasm, astonishment, delight—we contemplate a picture in soft, unstriking tints—a picture that brings before us a counterpart of our own existence among these mighty ancients.

Just as the Corso is the rendezvous for the pomaded *flâneurs* of to-day, so was the Via Sacra graced by Roman youth in centuries past. It was bordered with shops, of which, of course, not a vestige remains. Its worn flagstones no longer resound with the tread of victorious armies, but are desecrated by the feet of bizarre sight-seers, and instead of a Horace musing here, a Cicero walking by with thoughtful mien, we find a harsh-voiced orange-woman, or Campagna peasant of bovine aspect. "Such contrasts one sees only in Rome."

L. L.

THE DULNESS OF MUSEUMS.

IN the *Nineteenth Century* the Rev. J. G. Wood, who is a well-known naturalist, and the author of several interesting books upon animal life and peculiarities, gives much interesting and useful information with regard to the general arrangement and improvement of the ordinarily dry-as-dust storehouses of natural history, which may be beneficial to some of our Canadian institutions of a similar class.

Oh, the dulness of museums! I speak on behalf of the general public. Full of interest to the expert, there is no concealing the truth that to the average individual a museum, of whatever nature, is most intolerably dull. I have long thought that in their management we have too much ignored the wants of the people. If they only visited museums for the purpose of study there would be no difficulty in the matter; but scarcely one in a thousand enters the door as a student. The remainder do so simply for amusement, and interfere terribly with those who go there for motives of research. We cannot ignore the general public, and welcome the student only; and to assimilate both and all it is evident, to my mind, that we ought to have three, if not more, absolutely different classes of museums addressed to different mental conditions. The first ought to be devoted entirely to purely scientific purposes, and to be secured from interruptions by outsiders. Then there should be a second class, intended for those who are trying to learn the rudiments of science, and who may in due time be promoted into the select band of regular students. Lastly, and quite as important as the two others, there should be a museum meant for the general public, and teaching them in spite of themselves.

Of the first kind there are magnificent examples in the collection of the College of Surgeons, and in the private departments of the British Museum, and the Natural History Museum at South Kensington, where all scientific work is done in strictest privacy.

Of the second order of museum there will soon be a nearly perfect example in the new departments of natural history at South Kensington.

But where is the museum for the general public? It is difficult for any one who is master of a subject to realise the sublimity of ignorance which characterises the class on behalf of which I am writing. During the existence of the late lamented Colinderies I paid several visits to the exhibition simply for the purpose of noting the comments of the observers. Any one would have thought that the most uneducated eye could dis-