

**A ROMAN LETTER.**

**MR. JOSEPH W. HECKMAN TELLS OF THE ETERNAL CITY.**

SOME MOST INTERESTING DETAILS—ST. PETER'S DESCRIBED—CHRISTMAS IN ROME—CHURCHES—RUINS—ANCIENT AND MODERN SCENES—A MOST INTERESTING SKETCH.

To the Editor of the True Witness:

DEAR SIR,—I had intended, before going to Italy, to have let you have, while there, some brief accounts of a few of the many interesting objects of interest I would have the pleasure of seeing during my anticipated stay of three months, but, as many of your readers are well aware, the intentions of a traveller, previous to his departure, somehow or other, are not carried out to the letter; nevertheless, I will try now, upon my return, to give you a sort of synopsis of parts of parts of this late Italian visit, which, I may here say, had been the great wish of mine for many years past, and now, since I have achieved it, I am sure it will linger fresh in my memory for a long time to come.

To a Catholic, such a visit, of course, far exceeds in interest that of a non-Catholic, for, besides the beautiful works of art, &c., the Church gives him matters of the deepest interest, nowhere to be found outside of Italy, for here is the Church's centre with its principal Head, besides its beautiful buildings, centuries old, of magnificent architecture, having very old and venerable contents dating from the primitive ages of christianity. I will, within this first letter concerning my visit, confine myself entirely to Rome, which I immediately repaired to upon landing in Naples, as I wished to be in the Eternal City for Christmas, so that I might follow the Church's celebrations during that joyous season. Arriving in Rome at night, the first thing the following morning was to hasten to the great basilica, St. Peter's, the first great attraction for the traveller arriving in the Eternal City, which has been so truly designated as "the most glorious structure that has ever been applied to the use of religion." Before referring to this noted basilica, let me quote the oft repeated lines of Byron:

"But thou of temples old, or altars new,  
Standest above—with nothing like to thee,  
Worthiest of God, the holy and the true.  
Since Zion's desolation, when that He  
Forsook the former city, what could be  
Of earthly structures, in His honor piled  
Of a sublimer aspect? Majesty,  
Power, glory, strength and beauty, all are  
Aided  
In this eternal ark of worship undefiled."

St. Peter's is a subject, vast in itself, which would take volumes to describe well. Its history I will not go into save to say its foundation by Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, in 324, which he desired to build over the tomb of the "Fisherman." This grand imperial structure—the admiration of the Christian world—took between eleven and twelve centuries to build. Hearing and reading so much of this colossal building, of course, I imagined a vast deal, which, when I viewed it at first, I was somewhat disappointed, but the oftener I saw it, its vastness grew upon me, and many were the times, during my Roman stay, I went to this magnificent temple and wandered within its beautiful colossal walls, every time seeing something new. It would take volumes, as I said, to describe the splendor, beauty and loveliness of this temple. Its many chapels with their altars, monuments and mosaic art, each magnificent, besides the numerous relics, etc., to be found therein. Indeed, had the Popes done little else, the world would be indebted to them for this, the grandest conception of the mind of man. Also to the architect, may I say, are the objects of interest found in St. Peter's. Italy, the land of marble, gave to St. Peter's the most beautiful and costly production ever found, and finished by noted men. To me, the more I beheld the workmanship of this marble temple, the more convinced I was of the beautiful and costly work of each square foot of its dimensions throughout. Most of the Seven Sundays I was in Rome, besides the many festas in December and January, I always made it a point to be, if possible, for Solemn Mass and Vespers in this basilica. Of course on Christmas day this vast cathedral was tolerably well filled, the celebrant being Cardinal Rampolla, Secretary of State, the music and ceremonies most grand, the former

by the Papal choir, whose voices seemed celestial, filling one's soul with a melody which I fancied could only be rivalled by the heavenly choir, and to see on this day, as well as on several others, the processions moving through this gorgeous basilica, or to wander about by one's self near the hour of the "Ave," meditating in the dim religious light which emanates from the eighty-nine (89) lamps, ever burning round the Confessio at the Papal altar, in which is a marble descent to the Sarcophagus of St. Peter, closed by doors of gilded bronze, can be better imagined than described. Rome's churches number nearly four hundred, so, even to attempt to describe the principal ones, and they, I can assure you are numerous, would be no easy task, nevertheless I will try to take your readers to some here and there which impressed me greatly. Christmas afternoon, as is the usual custom, immense throngs of people found their way to the beautiful church of *S. Maria Maggiore*, third in rank of the great churches in Rome, to hear Vespers sung and to see the procession with a portion of our Saviour's crib in a superb reliquary borne through the church, was very fine. The church's interior is surpassingly beautiful, consisting of three naves, severed by some forty-four Ionic columns of white marble. In the right and left transepts are the beautiful Sistine and Borghese chapels of inestimable cost. Another of the first grand churches I aimed to see was *St. Paul's* on the Ostian Way, a short distance outside of the walls. This church was begun in 338, the site of a more ancient one, and many times was restored and embellished. I was told, before the great fire of 1823, this was the finest and most interesting church in Rome. The afternoon I viewed the gorgeous decorations of the church was very fine, and, as I stood at the west end of the nave, alone at the time in this church, its grandeur as it met my eye was of unsurpassing beauty. Formerly, it was a Basilica with double aisles and open roof, and the architrave was supported by eighty columns of costly marble. The present state is similar, save the ceiling of the nave, which is richly coffered instead of being open. The fine collection of pictures in mosaic of all the Popes, below the gorgeous ceiling, is most beautiful, and to see this grand superlative reflected in the polished variegated marble pavement is magnificent in the extreme. Here, under the Papal altar, are the mortal remains of the Apostles Sts. Paul and Timothy. I can assure you this church captivated me for quite a while. Walking back to the *portico S. Paolo*, I noticed a small chapel, which indicates the spot where Saints Peter and Paul took leave of each other on their last journey when about to suffer martyrdom, and the latin inscription seen here, translated, says: "At this place St. Peter and St. Paul, on their way to suffer martyrdom, separated; and Paul said to Peter: May peace be with thee—foundation of the Church and pastor of all the lambs of Christ. And Peter said to Paul: Go in peace, thou preacher of the good, and guide of the just in the way of Salvation."

The Basilica of St. John of Lateran claimed my attention several times. This church, "*omnium urbis et orbis ecclesiarum mater et caput*," was the principal church of Rome after the time of Constantine the Great. This church's two facades, both on the east and south sides, are of the best description found in Rome. The interior, of great length, is beautifully finished, and is flanked by double aisles borne by twelve pillars. In the niches are statues of the twelve Apostles, over these again are the figures of twelve prophets. The gorgeous ceiling is said to have been designed by Michael Angelo. The richly inlaid pavement attracted my notice very much. This church contains many relics. I was informed the Chapter of the Lateran still takes precedence of St. Peter's. Near this church is the building containing the *Scala Sancta*, which I visited twice while in Rome. It is the flight of twenty-eight marble steps from Pilate's palace at Jerusalem, which Our Saviour ascended and descended. They were brought to Rome, in 326, by the Empress Helena. Here daily can be seen many ascending them on their knees, the only way ever done. The marble is covered with hard wood, in which are niches for the faithful to touch these steps, sanctified by the Sacred feet and stained by the Precious Blood of the World's Redeemer 1862 years ago. At their top I viewed

with awe the *Santa Sanctorum* chapel, formerly the private chapel of the Popes. The last day of the past year I went to the Church of the Gesu, visited before, for the Benediction service and "Te Deum," which is always well filled with worshippers, and upon this occasion crowded with people from the prince to the beggar, each eager to return thanks for the mercies received during the year just ending. This sight was most imposing, myriads of candles lighting this beautiful church, with the high altar in gorgeous hangings and the chant of the "Te Deum" taken up by thousands of voices, accompanied by the grand organ and the incense as it ascended, emblematic of the prayers of the people present, struck me, a Catholic, with an awe and feeling never to be forgotten. This church is the principal one of the Jesuits, and one of the richest and most gorgeous in Rome, built early in the 16th century. The ceiling painting, "Triumph of the Name of Jesus," is very fine. The walls are covered with most valuable marble and the chapels, numbering many, are costly finished. To the left, in the transept, is the altar of St. Ignatius with beautiful surroundings, the columns being of lapis-lazuli and gilded bronze. The two statues, "God the Father" and "Christ," both by two of the ablest masters, behind which, encircled by a halo of rays, is the emblematic Dove. Very noticeable is the globe of the earth, consisting of a single block of lapis-lazuli (said to be the largest in existence.) Beneath the altar is a beautiful sarcophagus containing the remains of the saint. At the sides are groups in marble symbolical of Religion and Faith.

The Pantheon claimed my attention several times. This ancient building seems to be the best preserved of all others, and still, I am told, has its original appearance. It is a rotunda, and its situation is quite near the Via Corso, the principal and busiest street in Rome. The history of the Pantheon dates from some thirty years before Christ. The interior is lighted by a circular aperture in the roof. The remains of Raphael and King Victor Emmanuel II. rest here. The portico of this building is very noticeable with its sixteen Corinthian columns of granite. Behind this building is the church of *S. Maria Sopra Minerva*, the only Gothic church in Rome, under the control of the Dominican order. To the left of the High Altar is seen Michael Angelo's "Christ with the Cross," besides, this church contains many valuable works of art. Of course, the Roman churches, being so many and so fine, a great deal of time must be given to get a fair idea of their beauty; nevertheless, there are also many signs of old historic interest which I oftentimes interspersed the churches with.

The Coliseum or Flavian Amphitheatre was given several visits. This old theatre, the largest ever built, is most imposing, its completion dating about A.D. 80. Its history, doubtless, many of your readers are familiar with. This huge structure is nearly all built with blocks of travertine, formerly held together by iron cramps, brick being only used in the interior. Its plan is elliptical, measuring nearly six hundred yards, its dimensions being 170 and 156 feet respectively. Part of the eastern portion is still preserved, four stories adorned with half columns of three different orders of architecture. We are told it had seats for 87,000 spectators. Thoughts of the terrible scenes enacted here make one's blood run cold. Beneath the arena are clearly seen the chambers and dens for the wild beasts. About one third only of this gigantic structure remains, which gives one a stupendous impression what it once was. Here also witnessed the martyrdom of many Christians in the first ages of the Church. Among those who gave their lives for the Faith was the glorious Bishop of Antioch, St. Ignatius, who was torn to pieces by lions here. Quite near here, which claimed my attention many times, are the imposing ruins of the Forum Romanum. A fair description of this very ancient site would take too long to describe, suffice to say, it is one of the sights of Rome, where are to be seen daily parties of tourists studying these very ancient ruins, all of which are very attractive. The principal buildings, whose remains we see at the present time, were built between the years B.C. 487 and A.D. 526; so one can easily understand a lively interest is taken here, besides, what we do see are well preserved. The Palatine Hill, quite near the south side of the Forum, proved to me

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most interesting, giving, as it does, much very interesting matter of study, besides from whose high elevation beautiful views of the Forum and different other points of the city can be seen, my camera being brought well into play here. The elevated parts of the hill, now the gardens, was once the site of the palace of Tiberius, near to which is the house of Livia, believed to have been the house of the father of Tiberius. This has been covered over for some time so as to preserve the principal wall-paintings, etc., in the rooms below, very interesting to see. There are many other ruins of buildings, consisting of palaces, etc. Here, as in the Forum, are seen continually people studying the ruins with guides, and artists sketching particular points.

(To be continued.)

**"THE SIGN OF THE CROSS."**

WILSON BARRETT'S NEW PLAY ENTHUSIASTICALLY RECEIVED IN ST. LOUIS.

Wilson Barrett produced "The Sign of the Cross" at the Grand Opera House in St. Louis, before an audience which filled the theatre to its limit. The play was received with unbounded enthusiasm. Its theme is unique. It deals with Christianity in conflict with paganism when Rome was toppling from her greatness, and immorality and licentiousness were esteemed the highest virtues.

Marcus, the prefect, has been expressly commissioned to exterminate at any cost the Christians. Like a second Saul of Tarsus, he spares none till he falls in love with Mercia, one of the despised sect, whose purity of life stays him in his persecutions, wins him to her love and finally to the cross.

The acting throughout was excellent. The play is admirable in dialogue and in construction. Mr. Barrett and Miss Jeffries have never done better work, and Mr. Wilson Barrett may be congratulated upon having scored, in the triple capacity of author, actor and manager, the greatest success of his life.

When Campello and Savarese, two canons of St. Peter's, left the Church and founded an Italian Protestant one, the various Protestant societies were overjoyed, and money came pouring in from all sides to build their new temple, almost under the shadow of the Vatican. The result is that Savarese is staying in a Catholic monastery, repenting his errors and striving to make amends for the scandals he caused, while Campello reached Rome in a very poor condition—almost dying—a few months ago, and asked to be taken to a convent where he has been nursed with great devotion. Recently he remarked that the Sisters were angels from heaven. What will become of their church is a matter of conjecture. What a heap of Protestant money gone for nothing.

A lawyer, residing in the north of England, and noted for his laconic style of expression, sent the following terse and witty note to a refractory client, who would not succumb to his reiterated demands for the payment of his bill: "Sir, if you pay me the enclosed you will oblige me. If you do not, I shall oblige you."