

## THE WAYS TO ROME.

*Conclusion.*

But the Roman landlord now found an enemy with which he could not deal as with those of his own kind. When the cultivation of the soil had ceased and only great herds roamed over the broad Campagna there came forth a subtle influence from the land which, little by little, has reduced it to its present desolate condition.

The soil is made up of the friable *tufa* coming from the decomposition of the great streams of lava sent forth ages ago by the Alban Mountain. It is only along a narrow strip of the plain, beginning just here at the tomb of Cecilia Metalla, that we find the strong lava rock resulting from a later eruption over the earlier *tufa*. It is the property of this volcanic soil greedily to suck up moisture and tenaciously to retain it. In autumn and winter all this land is brown and bare with little but dry stubble upon it, because the intense heat of summer has at the very last dried up its moisture. But with the heavy rains of winter and springtime the soil will again become spongy and damp, and so remain month after month through the greatest heats into the Dog-days.

Then such vegetation as can be seen, perhaps, nowhere else in the world, will spring up on every hillside. Myriads of flowers, homely or exotic elsewhere, will here bloom together—crimson-tipped daisies, daffodils with perfume as of the tuberose, fox-gloves and hollyhocks, lupins and gorgeous scarlet poppies that wave from the top of every tomb and crumbling tower—even the very thistles will flaunt their purple tufts and give a crown of glory to the land. But then the tourist will be warned not to pass through these beautiful vales after the sunset, for it is the hour when the subtle influence is rising to stalk abroad through the land. It is the dreaded malaria, generated by the moisture left stagnating in fertile soil through lack of cultivation; and the lack of cultivation began with the great landholdings, when the people were driven away and all this fair region was turned to the pasturage of cattle by landlords "absentee" in Greece or by the Hellespont.

This is the state of the Roman Campagna down to the former Neapolitan frontier. Perhaps no government will ever command the necessary means and men to bring it back to that state of fertility when fifty independent nations two thousand years ago lived from its broad acres. But their natural fertility is so great that they prove a source of riches to the few owners who can brave the deadly fever. Even so, in the summer season all with the night seek the protection of some neighbouring hill, or of the city itself, against the subtle enemy.

But so far we have said little of the tomb before us. It is an immense round tower of Roman brick, once cased with marble, resting on a square foundation of massive blocks of travertine. Nearly all that remains of ancient adornment is a band of ox skulls alternating with festooned garlands round the upper part. From this the neighbouring peasants have called it for centuries the Tower of the Bull's Head. Conspicuous above it are the forked battlements which distinguished the Ghibellines of the Middle Ages. For these Roman tombs have suffered many a curious change in the course of time. This one was used by the great Gaetani family as their stronghold; and from its wall to the ruins across the road they extended their castle like a monstrous toll-gate whence they might domineer over the whole Appian Way, lords or brigands as we choose to consider them. The great tomb far away at the end of the long line was used in like fashion by the Orsini family, which still remains in its broad possessions of the Roman Field.

Another curious thing of this tomb is that it has the same buff colour which distinguishes ruins and ancient buildings alike through all this part of Italy, as if the Italian sun had somehow got into the eyes of men and created in the colour-sense a craving for something of its own sheen.

The period of Rome's boundless wealth and luxury passed away, and with it the memory of most of these great landed proprietors who, to the ruin of their country, built up these monuments of an idle ostentation.

... much alone we know—Metella died,  
The wisest Roman's wife: behold his love or pride.

It was in those last days of human vanity, which were to end in the subtle malaria of these fields, that another influence sprang up, subtler and more powerful and which from here was to spread little by little through the whole world. This was the religion of the Christian Martyrs who lie by hundreds of thousands in the Catacombs beneath these fields.

From his prison in Jerusalem the Apostle Peter came out hither to the Jews who had settled around the gate opening on the Appian Way. They were the lowly and despised of this world; but their traditional industry and enterprise, and the purity of their social relations had already made them felt as an element in the corrupt Roman society. Along this Appian Way St. Peter, and later on St. Paul came to find their countrymen and to spread among them, and among the Romans in whose midst they lived, the faith of the Crucified God. To Him they had given up their lives, and for Him they were to suffer death in this same Rome. St. Luke, who was St. Paul's companion, in the *Acts of the Apostles* tells how the new Christians of this Jewish colony came out to meet them far along the Appian Way when the great Apostle was brought as a prisoner to Caesar. But there is something more interesting yet about this Way than the passing over it of those who were to give the beginning to the Roman Church. It is connected with the great estates whose palaces and monuments lined the Queen of High Ways.

The Cecilian family, as has been said, found its crowning glory in the Martyr St. Cecilia, who was laid to rest with countless other martyrs, Popes and priests and simple faithful, in the Catacombs on her own estate. But these Catacombs had long before been opened to Christian burial by a more ancient member of her race, one who has been eulogized by no less a pagan than the historian Tacitus and who may have received St. Peter himself when he first came to Rome. It is only the diligent deciphering of inscriptions long hidden under the ground, which has made it possible during the last few years to identify this noble matron. Tacitus, who saw in the Christian religion only an "execrable superstition," was still able to appreciate the fruits of that religion in a saintly life which he wondered at and eulogized without understanding.

In the year 48 after Christ, shortly after the arrival of St. Peter in the Capital of the world, Pomponia, a matron of high rank, suddenly changed her worldly life to the unqualified astonishment of her pagan friends. She withdrew from society, she put on the garments of mourning, and went to live retired on her country estate. Some thought she was mourning her intimate friend Julia, of the family of Caesar, who had been put to death under Tiberius in one of the endless intrigues of his corrupt court. But the years passed by, and there was no change in the manner of her life. "She lived long," says Tacitus, "always in her sadness. During forty years she wore only the habit of mourning."

At last this existence, so singular in the world of that day, excited suspicion. Pomponia was accused of joining in "foreign superstitions." According to the Roman law, she was handed over to the judgment of her husband. He was an old consul, who had a hand in the conquest of Britain. He seems to have had something of the old-time honour. After holding a council of his noble family, he declared his wife innocent and free to continue in the way of life she had chosen. Recent discoveries made in the excavation of the first Christian cemeteries along the Appian Way show that the famous crypt of Lucina, which ran into the Catacombs of St. Callistus where St. Cecilia was buried, was the private property of Pomponia. Among the earliest Christian inscriptions there is one narrating the virtues of a young Pomponius, two generations later, showing that this Christian matron had left the heritage of her faith to her descendants. It is not certain even that the name *Lucina*, which means the "enlightened one" and which is attributed to the powerful Roman matron who preserved the bodies of the first Christian martyrs, is not the mystic name of this same Pomponia.

So does this Appian Way bring back the memory of the