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DR. NELSON'S LETTERS FROM EUROPE.

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THE CHURCH OF ST. PETER.

Desirous of seeing what we can in this city of wonders, we made an early visit, Monday morning, to the church of St. Peter, which is called a Basilica.

This, indeed, is a most interesting edifice, not only on account of its present grandeur, but on account of its site, its origin and its history. Taking my statistics from Murray, I venture upon a brief notice of it. An Oratory or place of worship, was erected by the first bishop of Rome, who was himself ordained by the apostle Peter, and on the very spot in which he was buried.

Constantine built a Basilica in the place of this Oratory. In 1450, the Pope commenced a new and larger edifice. The work lingered, but was at length urged on by Julius the 2d, in the next century. The plan originally was that of a Greek cross, but was finally changed into that of a Latin cross, with an immense cupola over the centre. After many changes and delays, the building was finished; although constant additions have since been, and are still being made.

The building of the main edifice occupied a period of 176 years. At the close of the seventeenth century, the cost amounted to 10,000,000 of pounds sterling, or \$50,000,000. And this was exclusive of the present Sacristy and other expensive additions. The space occupied by the edifice is 240,000 square feet. The immense colonnades in the front, which have such an imposing effect as you approach it, are semi-circular, 60 feet wide and 61 feet high, supported by four rows of immense columns, so far apart, as to leave room between the inner rows for two carriages to pass. The number of columns in the two colonnades is 284. On the entablature are 192 statues of saints, 12 feet high. The area inclosed by these colonnades, measures, in its greatest diameter, 777 feet.

The portico is about 48 feet broad, comprising the vestibules at its extremities, which are occupied by equestrian statues of Constantine and Charlemagne.

From the entrance to the tribune, or chair of St. Peter, the length is 576 feet; the breadth, 246; the length outside, is 660 feet; and the middle nave, is 141 feet high.

The confessional of St. Peter, where is the tomb containing his ashes, is surrounded by 142 lamps, constantly kept lighted.

The great cupola is 140 feet in diameter, and the elevation of it from the pavement is 450 feet. For the last of these statistics, I am mainly indebted to a little guide book, called "Rome Seen in a Week."

The whole interior of the church, is filled by chapels, domes, altars, and wonderful adornings of statues, paintings, columns, arches, guildings, mosaics, and whatever can captivate the eye of the beholder. While in the church, we were delighted by a full organ, and singing by a choir of great excellence. The music in such a place, had indeed great power.

THE VATICAN.

From the church, we passed into the palace of the Vatican, which is immediately connected with it, and which is a union of several palaces, built at different times. The whole, therefore, is an irregular pile. It is 1080 feet long, and 720 broad. It has 8 large, and about 200 small stair ways, with several thousand halls and rooms of different dimensions. We met the Swiss guards, with the showy uniform, in almost every part of the building,—the Vatican, being, as is well known, the residence of the Pope.

We at once entered the galleries containing the most extensive collection of ancient and more modern art, that anywhere exists.

The first we entered was the gallery of Constantine, in which is represented the decisive battle under the banner of the Cross, which secured to him the Roman empire.

Next we entered several galleries of Raphael, covered with his Fresco. One represents Peter chained in his prison, and the angel come to deliver him. This was illuminated, and was very striking.

Another represents the School of Athens, said to be one of the greatest works of Raphael. On the upper steps of the portico, you see Plato and Aristotle, surrounded by their disciples. On another part are Soarates and Pythagoras. You see also, Diogenes and Archimedes. These are all very striking and characteristic paintings. Mount Parnassus too, by the same master, is a magnificent exhibition. It shows Apollo playing on his harp, and groups of beautiful muses together, with Homer, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Sappho, and other distinguished poets.

In another gallery is the Transfiguration, also by Raphael. This is the most striking painting I have yet seen. Mount Tabor is distinctly set before you. On its summit, our Saviour, together with Moses and Elias, arrayed as it were in celestial glory, seem floating in the air a little above the surface, while the three disciples are prostrate, partly looking up and partly covering their eyes from the too dazzling light. At the foot of the mountain are seen the nine disciples, receiving the sick for healing.

Several other large paintings are seen in the room, all exceedingly fresh and perfect. The figures seem alive. We almost expect to see them move, and hear them speak.

The dying scene of St. Jerome, in the act of receiving the sacrament of the Supper, is another of Raphael's wonderful productions. The saint, as seen on the canvas, has every appearance of a dying old man. Friends and attendants are around him, manifesting the greatest grief,—while angels are seen waiting to conduct his spirit to the abodes of the blest.

In another room, is a beautiful painting, representing Christ setting on a rainbow, surrounded by angels. This is by Corregio.

But I must not specify more. It would take weeks to describe the almost innumerable paintings.

STATUARY.

We next visited the Greek gallery of statuary and other remains. And here again, nothing could be more hopeless than any attempt at full description. Many of the remains exhibit little incidents and scenes and characters in the most ludicrous light. All are perfect in the execution, and most true to nature.

Among the rarer wonders we saw here, are two immense Sarcophagi or Porphyry. They are half the size and nearly of the form of a freight-car in the United States. One contains the remains of a daughter of Constantine, the other, of the Empress Helena. These Sarcophagi rest on lions of white marble, and are covered with beautiful carved figures.

We notice also, a very large and beautiful Porphyry basin or vase, which must be at least 15 feet in diameter.

These curiosities are contained in vast marble domes, covered above with Mosaics and Frescos. Among the sculptures, are those of an Atlas, from the lion, down to the most insignificant; all perfect in their kind. The famous Apollo Belvedere was there, a wonderful exhibition of the human form in all its grace and beautiful proportion. The Laocoon, with his two sons, writhing in the folds of the serpents, seemed like a living, horrible reality.

ANCIENT RUINS.

In the afternoon, we rode out of the city

through its ancient high walls, with their battlements, and by the Pyramid of Rome, which, though by no means equal to them, is yet a sample of the wonderful structures of this kind in Egypt. We passed on some two miles, to the tomb, or mausoleum of Caecilia Metalla, wife of Crassus. It is a marble rotunda, some seventy feet in height, and apparently in perfect preservation. It stands on the old "Appia Via" by which we returned to the city. We stopped for a few moments, to look into two square edifices, also in a perfect state of preservation. The one, was a tomb of Augustus Cæsar, in which the ashes of his slaves were deposited. The other, a tomb of Pompey the Great, used for the same purpose. As you look into each, you see hundreds of little cavities, in which the vessels, or urns perhaps, containing these ashes, were deposited.

Passing extensive ruins of the stables belonging to one of the Emperors, whose high walls yet remain; we stopped for some time at the baths of Caracalla, under the eastern slope of the Aventine hill. With the exception of the Coliseum, these are the most extensive ruins in Rome. The area which they occupy, is not less than a mile in circuit. The walls rise to an immense height; and while the beautiful pavement is laid open in a part of the edifice, vast arches and parts of domes yet appear. One has a peculiar sensation, as he walks among, or rather in the enclosure, of these ruins.

PALACES AND TEMPLES.

Tuesday morning, we visited the Palace Borghese. The building itself is imposing, but we visited it chiefly for its pictures.—These are contained in nine rooms on the ground floor; and many of them are not only from the best masters, but of the highest merit. Among these, is the Chase of Diana,—the goddess is seen attended by her nymphs; the Entombment of Christ, by Raphael, and the first of his historical paintings. The Prodigal Son, beautifully colored, is also here. But I must not particularize.

From the gallery of paintings, we went to the Pantheon; a vast rotunda covered with a dome. The exterior of the building, is all entire, and it is magnificent in its appearance. No Roman remains are so perfect as this.—The portico, sustained by 16 massive columns, is beautiful; nay, sublime in its architecture. The arched doorway into the temple is very high. This building has passed, with little alteration, from a heathen to a christian temple. Byron says of it,

"Simple, erect, severe, austere, sublime.
Shrine of all saints, and temple of all the gods."

The inscription on the frieze, shows that it was built by Agrippa. The rotunda is 143 feet in diameter within, and the walls are 20 feet thick. The height from the pavement to the summit is 143 feet. It has many columns of the Corinthian order. The third chapel on the left contains the tomb of Raphael.

In the afternoon, we visited the palace, called the golden palace of Nero, and afterwards the palace of Titus; as the latter Emperor occupied one built on the same site. In one part, the lower story of this palace remains to a large extent, and I should judge, as many as twenty of the halls, rooms, and baths, cleared of the rubbish, now appear entire. They are all arched overhead, and many of these arches are covered with distinct, and often beautiful fresco painting. Several of the rooms, as also the main hall, appear very large, and apparently 25 or 30 feet in height. One is amazed, as he passes from apartment to apartment through the arched doorway, and looks above and around. In a church not far distant, we saw a beautiful marble and Mosaic pavement taken from this palace, as also a marble chair, now entire; a highly ornamented bronze door, and several rich columns.—Here was found also the large Porphyry vase,

seen in the Vatican, and the admirable statue of Laocoon.

I find it very difficult to notice at all what we are seeing from day to day, without being so general on the one hand, as to destroy the interest of the communication, or so minute on the other, as to become tedious. With the endeavor, however, to avoid both these extremes, I will now proceed with my narrative. It being a rainy day, we chose to seek such curiosities as should be under cover.—We first then, Wednesday morning, visited

THE DORIA PALACE.

This is a large edifice, built at several times. It has an extensive gallery of paintings, which engaged our attention for several hours. In the ante-room, is a Fresco of Noah's sacrifice; and different rooms of the gallery exhibit, among a multitude of others, the following pictures:—Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness; Abraham, sacrificing Isaac—this is most striking and instructive; Herodias, with the head of John the Baptist; Sampson, with the jaw bone in his hand; Flight of Joseph, Mary, and the child Jesus, into Egypt; the Creation of birds and animals, &c. &c.

We next visited the gallery of St. Luke. This contains a small, but very fine collection. I knew that St. Luke was a physician and a writer, but I did not know before that he was an artist; yet here, he is represented, in a fine picture by Raphael, as in the act of painting the Virgin, and of producing a very beautiful portrait.

Among the paintings here, the subjects are more classical than sacred; St. Luke, notwithstanding. "Fortune," represented on her wheel with an angel attending her, is to me the most perfect painting I have ever yet seen. I find in these galleries, the originals of many of the most interesting pictures we see in the United States. Of course, the copies in general, must be inferior to these originals, directly produced as they were by the greatest masters.

Old Rome was abundantly supplied with water, by means of its magnificent aqueducts; one of which, and I suppose the principal one, yet remains, as a monument to the greatness and durability of the works of this wonderful people. Beautiful fountains are now seen in every part of the city. There is one in particular near our hotel, which arrests attention. It is at the base of a marble temple highly ornamented, and now occupied as a school for boys. Amidst crags and rocks of every rude form, the water gushes forth in little rivulets and cascades overspreading the whole. In the centre, is an imposing marble statue of old Neptune seated in his car, and urging on his large, and apparently furious water steeds, as if now emerging from the floods.

The report of our next day's excursions must be briefly given. First, we examined the exterior of the College of the Propaganda. The building is very extensive, some three hundred feet long, but shows nothing worthy of particular notice. We stopped next at a church, rather small in its dimensions, but interesting within. It had a picture of the Trinity. Its columns were of alabaster, and its ornaments exceedingly rich. We stopped at another church of very large dimensions. It is one of those edifices, which are called Basilicas. Its pavement is Mosaic, and its walls are ornamented with beautiful fresco pictures. The pillars are of immense size, composed of granite from Egypt; I judged them to be 15 feet in diameter, and about 45 in height. Two rows of marble run diagonally through the pavement, on which are marked the different times of the day; and over these marks of figures, the sun light passes as it shines through the window above. All was designed by Michael Angelo. We

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