

ANENT READING, IN THE CITY OF ROME,
THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS.

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In a piazza near the centre of Rome, on the summit of a column more than 120 feet high, stands a statue of the Apostle Paul. This is almost the one recognition in this city of him who gave to the church here the grandest revelation that ever was written of what it is most important for man to know. The column is pagan, placed there in honor of Marcus Aurelius, so that the expense of the erection was not incurred as a memorial of the apostle. An inscription on the pedestal, put there by order of Pope Sextus V asserts that the column was first erected in memory of Antoninus Pius, thus affording an illustration of the unreliability of papal tradition even when endorsed by an infallible pope. The fact is not without significance that amidst the crowd of magnificent churches in Rome, dedicated to S. Maria, S. Pietro, and not a few unknown saints, I have not found one of any note dedicated to S. Paul. Outside the city, a mile and a half beyond the gates, sustained chiefly by subscription from foreign lands, is the grand erection of S. Paolo fuori le mura. But even in this church Peter shares the honors. It would almost appear that the Romans are jealous lest Paul should be considered the equal of Peter, and yet there is no satisfactory evidence that Peter was ever at Rome, much less that he accepted a bishopric in the city; whilst there can be no doubt that Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans gave the greatest gift that ever a man made to a city. The indifference to the Apostle of the Gentiles would be mysteriously incomprehensible were it not certain that the teaching of this great apostle is seen to be antagonistic to the dogmas of the papacy, and that his epistle to the Galatians is opposed to its

unfounded claims. Yet it is strange, and amongst the mysteries that puzzle the visitor to Rome, that whilst Paul wrote to the city his greatest epistle and whilst in the city wrote at least five of the most precious of those inspired oracles which abide with us to-day as perennial fountains of holy thought, yet here, by people professedly Christian, they are uncared for and even by many unknown.

And it is further remarkable that, in comparison with what might have been expected, very little can be learned here concerning the visits of the apostle. I have diligently visited the places, to which tradition attracts, as marking his footsteps. It has to be kept in mind that the soil of Rome has risen at least twenty feet since his time. There is the crypt of the church in Via Lata, said to be the site of the apostle's hired house. There is the neglected church of St. Prisca, in a back lane, of which the evidence is better, that somewhere near was the residence of Aquila and Priscilla. There is the church of S. Pudenziana, thought by many to be the site of the house of of Pudens. There is a place in the Jews' quarter where Paul is reported to have preached but the proof of this is far from being satisfactory. There are the ruins of the Domus Flaviorum on the Palatine, where presumably the trial took place. There is a house at the corner of the Via degli Stregari where he is said to have held the conference with the Jews recorded in the book of the Acts. There is the Mamertine prison with legends transparently false. There is the place where Paul is said to have taken farewell of Peter before his martyrdom, and there is Tre Fontana, where there is a monastery in which monks prepare a fiery spirit and tell a ghastly story of the great Apostles' death. It is almost certain that whilst at Rome the Apostle dwelt in two houses; one with Aquila and Priscilla on the Aventine, and another with Pudens on the Viminal. But papal authorities have shown great carelessness in regard to the identification of the sites.

Visiting these places in a condition of mind open and anxious to learn something more of the great saint,

to whom we owe so much, I confess, sadly, that I am not indebted to one of them for a single thought that could throw light on any of his epistles or movements. I do not owe papal authorities one single thank for enabling me to understand Paul a little more. They have plenty to say about Peter, of which, unhappily, I am unable to believe a single statement. Nevertheless leaving all the miserable and, for the most part, lying legends, I venture to think that since I have been at Rome some helpful light has come to me on some of Paul's writings; for which I bless the true giver of all light and knowledge.

Wandering in the municipal museum of antiquities I came across an ancient tablet brought there recently from the river side, which had the record of five curators being appointed by the Emperor Claudius to the dignity of conservators of the river Tiber. Of these, two bear the name of Paulus. This indicates that there was, at that time, in Rome a noble family, or gens, or clan, of this name. According to Roman custom, the member of an honorable gens might not use the hereditary surname of his house without permission. It is probable that Saul of Tarsus was of the Paulus gens, but could not use the name of the noble family with which he was connected without some authoritative permission, and this was granted him when brought into connection with the Proconsul Sergius Paulus at Paphos, whose name appears on this tablet, and who was converted by the Apostle's teaching. Then, Luke writes of "Saul, who also is called Paul;" and by that name he was known ever after. If this view is accurate, it clears some interesting questions. Paul's writings indicate not only mental power, but considerable culture, and that of the Latin type. This is what might be expected, when it is seen, that he was connected with a family of Roman rank, and hence had moved among persons of cultivated manners, and in early life had been surrounded by influences of a superior character. Paul was a Jew, and thought as a Jew; but his epistles show an intellect trained, not alone on Rabbinical literature, but also on that of Greece and

Rome. The Roman gentleman of that age took much delight in Greek language and literature.

With such an education we can well understand his eager desire as a Roman to visit Rome, and as a Christian to touch the springs of thought in the metropolis of the world. "I must also see Rome" he 'purposed in the spirit.' "So must thou bear witness also in Rome" his Lord said to him. In his Epistle to the Romans, three times, in strong terms he expresses his desire, of many years, and of frequent prayer, to fulfill his wish often purposed and hindered. At length he is in the city. Visitors to Rome from distant lands tell of the quickened pulse and incandescent expectation with which they entered for the first time. What must have been the emotion of that great soul as he drew near! It was his own city, the subject of many a dream in boyhood, the fulfillment of the longing of years, and he entered on a mission direct from his Lord. Rome was then in the zenith of her glory. She had just sat down on her throne as empress of the world. Her palaces and temples were in their greatest splendor. On arriving Paul probably passed the Palatine and went through the Forum on his way to the Pretorium. He could not fail to notice those splendid buildings whose ruins charm us to-day, the columns of the temple of Castor and Pollux, of which the three remaining are so conspicuous at the present hour; and the noble Basilica of Julia, and the grand facade of the temple of Saturn, with its broad steps, of white marble glistening in the bright sunshine. Weary with possibly a walk of eleven miles since early dawn his vigor revives as he looks around. A troop of Roman soldiers with heavy tramp crosses the open space. Along the Via Sacra generals and senators drive in chariots rattling on the paving blocks of travertine. A multitude of indolent men and women are gathered listening to an oration from the Rostra. There are noisy children playing their games. High towering over all is the Palatine rock, with its magnificent palaces the roofs glittering with gilded tiles. As we stand to-day in the sepulchre of that bye-gone splendor

of architecture, astonished at the bewildering extent of the ruins, the "crumbs dopt from the feast of time," in imagination they take form, the grandest erections of the human race. Horace makes us acquainted with the scene; and we wonder how they appeared to the Apostle Paul, and what influence they had upon his thought. For we can not resist the stream of inflowing ideas.

The consideration of sub-conscious mental activity is full of interest. If Paul has not left on record any impressions he may have received of the scenes he witnessed, still they must have influenced his thought. Seeds may be wafted into a garden, unnoticed, and there remain until they find root and grow. So in our minds. Beneath the surface of consciousness seed-thoughts find a place, lie and germinate unobserved, and in time spring up and bear flowers and fruits. Though Paul has left no mention of these wonderful scenes in his writings he may still have been so affected by them that they influenced and guided his thoughts. It is well agreed that whilst at Rome he wrote the Epistles to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians and Philemon. Probably that to the Ephesians was the first, and written soon after his entrance into the city. So it appeared to me and in that light I studied it at Rome. The consideration before us is not affected by the question as to whom it was addressed.

A prominent thought in this epistle is the Imperial nature of Christianity. It is found elsewhere in Paul's writing, but here it is the dominant note. A visit to the Palatine and Forum would nourish this. Paul stood there just after all the nations of earth, refined and barbarous had been "gathered together in one." And the Emperor, whose dwelling was in those vast palaces, had "all things put under his feet" so far as earthly rule was concerned and was raised above all the monarchs of the world. The thought of this must have influenced men's thoughts in various ways. Most would be dazzled with the splendor and believe that it would endure with irresistible might. There is a moral grandeur in the Apostle seeing in all

this but the beauty of an evanescent bubble which ere long would burst, and fixing his thought on the solid foundation and divine strength of the kingdom of his Lord. There is something very sublime in Paul, a prisoner, chained to a soldier, writing to his friends and not even mentioning the glories of Cæsar, but telling them that he knows "the mystery of the Divine will" which is "that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance." What a subject for a great picture when an artist shall arise who will study the New Testament, rather than the paltry church legends! And again, "God hath set Christ at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and has put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." There is a sublime faith in this reference to the church. What was it at that hour? In Rome it appears to have consisted of two parties. There were some educated persons of a respectable class which found a center at the house of Priscilla and Aquila, men and women to whom it was suitable to send an epistle of such profound thought as that to the Romans. And there were Jewish converts, believers, but of narrow prejudices, that gathered near the river side, who waited on the Apostle by deputation, but with whom he appears to have had but little intercourse. There is very little to lead to the conclusion that there was any united church organization in the city; but rather that there was considerable divergence amongst the professing Christians. We read of some who "by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" of those "which cause divisions and offenses." And even of some who were antagonistic to the Apostle, preaching Christ in such a way as to suppose to add affliction to his bonds. Throughout this

epistle there is evidence of a great fissure amongst the believers of that age in relation to the vocation of Israel. Paul looks through and beyond the feebleness and disunion and sees all parties formed into one new "perfect man," the body of Christ to share unutterable glory. He would look through the seen and transitory to the real and eternal. Though now we see not as yet all things put under his feet, yet all the show and glitter of that age, has "like an unsubstantial vision faded." So of all the pageants of earth. The pomp of the Vatican has taken its place, but that too is but the shifting scene of the great "lantern show of time" and will pass away. The Lord Christ and His Church are the true and permanent reality, he must reign King of Kings and Lord of Lords for ever and ever.

The splendors of the palaces of Caesars on that remarkable rock called the Palatine, were very great. The ruins to-day are bewildering in their massive extent. From that place comes the word "palace" in almost every modern language, meaning the residence of a monarch. It is suitable that the home of a king should have a splendor commensurate with the resources of his empire. To pass through a nation of extensive territory and wealth, and arriving at the dwelling of the sovereign to find it low and mean would be felt to be incongruous. Looking up at the Palatine the question might well arise: What shall be the magnificence of the palace of our King when Jesus appears in glory? Surely its splendor will be something higher than the material, than columns of gilded marble. His palace must be spiritual, where all is life, built of living stones. Hence the beautiful imagery of the second chapter of this epistle, where a palace is described "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom, all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God, through the Spirit."

The figure of the body and its members, which appears

to have been in the thought of Paul, throughout the composition of the epistle, may have been, as some think, suggested by the parable of the orator Agrippa, so well known in Rome; or it may have arisen naturally. But the finely wrought-out illustration, toward the close, of the enduement of the armor of God, leaves little doubt that it was suggested by what Paul saw in the Pretorium, where the process of arming and preparing to stand on guard must have been of very frequent occurrence.

There is one expression peculiar to this epistle to the Ephesians *'en tois 'epouraniois*. It occurs in what is almost the opening sentence and is repeated several times. Our translators do not seem to have been clear whether it means places or things, high or heavenly. It is a state or region where all spiritual blessings are stored Iv. 3: it is where Christ is enthroned Iv. 20: it is where the redeemed sit together with him IIv. 6: it is where the manifold wisdom of God is revealed to principalities and powers IIIv. 10, and it is the ylace of conflict with spiritual wickedness VIv. 12. From the low valley of the Forum Paul might have looked up and seen the Palatine palace towering in the clear blue sky. There were the treasuries of the empire, there was the court where the Emperor held his throne far above the known powers and dominions of earth, and with a name above every name; there his favorites were gathered to sit with him; there were discussed and proclaimed imperial decisions for ruling the empire; and there was the scene of conflicting opinions amidst which there was peril of treachery so that the courtiers had ever to be on their guard and having done all to stand. Is it fanciful to see some suggestions here?

Very glorious and elevating is the revelation of the condition to which the believer is uplifted through faith in his risen Lord. Raised to sit with Christ, blessed with all spiritual blessings, learning the wisdom of God, and yet not free from conflict. If Paul had this suggested by the sight of the high towering Palatine palaces, it might also explain the emphasis which is found in the epistle

given to the word "access." He must have soon found the difficulty of gaining admission and an audience. For two years he waited his hearing, which it is most probable took place in the basilica, not far from the center of the summit of the famous rock. The need of a friend at court was manifest. It might well awaken gratitude that "through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father" and "we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him."

Since then there may be traced such striking parallel between the thoughts natural to the locality, and the special spiritual teaching of the epistle; can it be fanciful to suppose that the one suggested the other? Giantism, it has been often remarked is the prevalent feature of the thought of Rome. The vastness of the ruins are overwhelming. They speak of a constant aim at world-wide dominion, and of the desire for palaces, basilicas and temples of unsurpassed splendor. The visitor, in his first letter to his friends rarely fails to show that he is deeply impressed by the unexpected extent of what he sees. It would certainly be surprising to find that Paul visited these scenes in the period of their splendor, and was unaffected. But his mind dwelt upon a city of incomparably mightier glories. So in his epistles he carries his thought into spiritual realities. A road-side puddle may suggest the ocean. The world-wide conquest and reign of the Cæsars, he saw, but at once his thoughts flew to the infinitely grander triumphs of his Lord. The wealth and splendor of the royal homes were before him, and his mind reverts to the mansions of the chosen people, above the heavens. Guided by the Holy Spirit he is not careful to pen a description of Rome, but will fill his space with thoughts of that home of Divine Love the breadth and length and depth and height of which passes knowledge. It is certainly noteworthy that the first epistle Paul wrote from Rome, should be marked by imperial ideas, and by thoughts and illustrations which might well have been suggested by what he saw. When in the light of eternity we recall the scenes and events

of earth it may be found, that the greatest glory of the magnificent palaces and temples of Rome was that they supplied the seed thoughts of an epistle which has been a revelation, a strength and a joy to generation after generation of the Church of God on earth.

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