

# ROME LETTER

(From our own correspondent.)

## CHRISTIANITY ON THE PALATINE.

In the company of a few of the early Christians let us stand, reader, on the Palatine Hill, the Pagan Palatine, upon which Romulus and Remus founded Rome in 753 B.C., Rome that was to conquer the then known world. How the Romans love the pagan side of this, the seat of empire, with all the glittering palaces gorgeous with plates of gold on the walls, its dazzling temples replete with the plunder of nations, its magnificent private mansions filled with the choicest marbles of Greece, the ivory of India, the basalt and porphyry of Egypt! A bird's-eye view is interesting of those conquering legionaries, stern officers, emperors mad from voluptuousness and pride of power, and empresses who lived in such splendor as to scarcely know themselves whether they were goddesses or mortals. It shows us how degraded is a nation without religion. We shall turn to a more pleasant side. Amid all this moral corruption, this seething mass of degraded humanity, there is one grand redeeming feature. Despite persecution, hatred, and intrigue, Christianity has made its way up from the alleys of Rome, up from the very Catacombs, and, gaining a foothold upon the Palatine Hill, the faith of Christ has entered the palace of Caesar, the lord of three continents.

## THE HOSPITABLE ISRAELITES.

It was in the year 42 A.D. that the first Pope toiled into Rome by the Appian Way to preach the Gospel. Poor and humble, he went first to the lowly. And hospitality was given him in the humble home of the kind Israelites, Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, on the Aventine Hill. In return, they received the gift of faith. History cherishes the memory of this kindly couple. When the Emperor Claudius ordered the expulsion of the Jews from Rome in 49 A.D., Aquila and Priscilla, who worked at tent-making, had to fly. They went to Corinth, where they were soon to have another guest in no less a personage than St. Paul. 'After these things,' says the New Testament, speaking of the arrival of the Apostle of the Gentiles at that once great city, 'after these things, departing from Athens, he came to Corinth, and finding a certain Jew, named Aquila, born in Pontus, with Priscilla his wife (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome), he came to them. And because he was of the same trade, he remained with them and wrought (now they were tent-makers by trade). Acts xviii. 1-3. The poor tent-makers sitting at St. Peter's feet on the Aventine were of his own social standing, and they were the first fruits of his mission to Rome. 'But,' says a writer of our day, 'several of Peter's first converts were taken from the very highest of Rome's proud nobles. Quintus Cornelius Pudens the elder, Senator and aristocrat, with his wife, the lady Priscilla; their son, Cornelius Pudens, about whom the Roman martyrology declares: "Having by the apostle's hands put on Christian baptism, he preserved the robe of his innocence unspotted even to the end of his life." Then came the noble Pomponia Graecina, the young wife of Aulus Plautus who conquered Britain; Nereus and Achilleus, military officers of Caesar's palace; Flavius Domitilla, one of Rome's wealthiest landowners; Aurelia Petronilla, a lady of senatorial family; and many Roman knights—all Peter's first converts.' But who were the Christians within the lion's den, the very palace of Caesar himself? Though Alexander Severus was not a Christian, he lost no opportunity of showing favor to the followers of the Crucified. A statue of our Lord stood in his household shrine, and upon the walls of his rooms ran the Christian motto: 'Quod tibi fieri non vis, Alteri ne feceris.' 'Do not do unto others what you would not wish to be done to yourself.' And who knows that the stern monarch would not have taken

Christ's sweet yoke, had not disappointed sycophants assassinated him in 235! In those days the world moved quickly. Who, after perusing the pages dealing with the Christian persecutions, would dare affirm that within nine short years from the day blood flowed most freely a Christian Emperor would rule in Rome? And yet Marcus Julius Philippus, or Emperor Philip the Arabian, as he is commonly called, ruled from 244 to 249, five years during which the Church had time to draw breath freely and gather her forces in view of coming storms. But blood, good and bad, tells sooner or later. Son of a brigand chief, child of the desert, Philip, who had fought his way up from the rank of a common soldier, disappointed the high hopes which the Christian and pagan worlds had reposed in him. Perhaps subsequent history would have been changed had not his ambition and cruelty goaded the legionaries to slay the emperor, and with him his twelve-year-old boy, in 249.

Philip wore the purple, but he proved no credit to Christianity, and in him the Church certainly takes no pride. And yet his death meant much to the Christians. Decius, the successor to Philip, may be catalogued with Nero in the torrents of Christian blood which he caused to flow. And when the Thracian barbarians tore this monster to pieces, his wife, Empress Triphonia, and his step-daughter, Cyrilla, became Christians: for the horrified wife and the terrified maid argued that a religion capable of withstanding so much persecution must have come from the One True God.

## IN THE LION'S DEN.

What were the feelings of Pope Caius while he lay in hiding during the Diocletian persecution of 286 in the very palace of the Emperor himself? You can answer this by asking: 'What should have been the state of mind of Pope Sixtus V., if, during the progress of the battle of Lepanto, he lay in the Sultan's palace instead of sitting in prayer by a window of the Vatican?' For the terrible old monarch had Rome and its suburbs searched with lamps by his soldiers and spies for the one who dared to call himself 'Pontifex Maximus.' And all the while Pope Caius lived in the rooms of Castulus, the young Christian officer of the imperial household, who had begged the Vicar of Christ to take refuge in the place which, of all spots on earth, would be the last subject of suspicion. So here you have the Pope himself: Castulus and his wife, the noble hearted Irene; Sebastian, the Tribune of the First Cohort (who lies out the Appian Way to-day under Bernini's masterpiece in San Sebastiano); Tiburtius, a companion officer of Castulus; and doubtless Chromatius, father of Tiburtius, who became Governor of Rome and soon afterwards suffered martyrdom,—all under the same roof as the old monster who gave ten years of his reign to history under the name of the 'Era of the Martyrs.' But in 286, as in 1914, the Church suffered sorely from apostates. We can well realise the fury of the dreaded Emperor when the apostate Tiburtius played the part of informer. Though Pope Caius had time to escape, Castulus fell into the hands of the soldiers and was burned alive. Then followed the double martyrdom of Sebastian, the Tribune of the First Cohort; for the Mauretanians' arrows left him only apparently dead, but the clubs of the victors gave him the martyr's crown. Just down there in the centre of the Stadium on the Palatine the cruel order of Diocletian was put into execution.

How anxious pagans in high places were, after all, ready to do services to Christians! Marcia, wife of Emperor Commodus, did not pertain to the True Fold nor was she meritorious of such a favor, and still she prevailed on Pope Victor to let her have a list of the Christians sentenced to slavery in the mines of Sardinia. Dead to all sense of shame and justice, still Commodus, the royal brute, did not refuse Marcia's plea for their liberty. And so on the proud aristocratic Palatine Christianity began to gain men's hearts, just as it had already done below in the Forum where the plebeians met to transact business and exchange gossip. Soldiers, loyal in peace, lions in war, were discovered to belong