

ROME: A CITY OF SURPRISES

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WHAT is round the corner in Rome is always a surprise. That is where it differs from our American cities, with their regular blocks and regimental squares. One moment you are in the midst of life, noise, the rush of the twentieth century; the next you have rounded a corner, and there the skeleton of decayed glory confronts you in the colonnaded ribs of vanished temples, in the broken joints of stately palaces. The hum of To-day subsides, and on your ear fall in ghostly whispers the accents of a mighty Yesterday. Another step, and you are in the Rome-which-is-to-be. As yet it is only emerging from a confusion of mortar and bricks; but perhaps, as students are already familiar with the ancient, a description of the new Rome will be more attractive. Anyhow we shall drive off from this fresh tee.

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A CITY AS A SYMBOL:

To catch and focus the spirit of a movement in a concrete form is to establish a power-house at the very centre, which will give vitality to the whole body. It is a stroke of genius when the symbol becomes an inspiration as well as a trade-mark. The flash of originality in the mind of Mussolini which led him to unearth the old Fasces, and embody there the spirit of his new movement, was one great factor of his success. It does not matter now that the ancient Romans had filched that emblem from the Etruscans. At best they were always greater imitators than inventors. They knew a good thing when they saw it, and took it. Tarquinius, when he packed his trunk for Rome, put in it the Fasces from his native land; transplanted to its new soil, this emblem flourished; and after another two thousand five hundred years it bids fair to bud into even greater bloom.

But even a bundle of sticks and an axe, though hoary with antiquity and encrusted with sentiment, cannot sum up an idea which has outgrown it. The genius of Mussolini has gone a step farther. Something bigger is required to measure the scope of a Fascism which has world-wide ambitions; so with his customary daring and prophetic insight he aspires to make his symbol a city—and that city Rome. The Fasces recalls the Republic; but the city the Empire.

To-day the very city has become an *inspiration*. No other in the world has such a past. Here was a talent lying in its napkin. Mussolini has unrolled it. He is now proceeding to unroll Rome in a wonderful fashion. Clouds of dust rise everywhere, heaps of mud and stones get in your way at every turn, thousands of workmen seem leisurely busy, and out of it all one can discern a new Rome arising from its grave; for it cannot shake off its ghostly shadow, and herein lies the inspiration. The shadow of Augustus grows more distinct as his Forum comes more to the surface. You can now walk up the marble steps of its old temple. These are living memories of Rome's greatest days. They are worn with the foot-steps of a proud people who felt themselves masters of the world. Rome at its greatest is to be the inspiration of its modern citizens. Therefore, although the cost of removing huge blocks of houses was very great, yet it was borne, that the long hidden glories of classical times might be revealed. The youthful Italian, gazing on these, catches the infection which lurks in their broken columns, and becomes fired with ambitions which Mussolini knows how to direct.

But the city is also an *incarnation*. Whatever other cities in Italy may aspire to, Rome's ambition is to show to the world what Fascism is and means to be. Discipline, which is a yoke rather irksome for the Italian shoulder, is here being firmly fastened on. The carabinieri have at last got something to do, although they are being gradually superseded by the municipal police, a handy body of men. These politely stop you and say that you must not go up that street, as it is a one-way thoroughfare only; or they request you to cross to the other pavement, so as to get into the stream of pedestrians going westwards or eastwards. An old carrozza driver, who understood the new-fangled rules little better than his horse, and who had been turned back from a street where only motors are allowed, looked round at me, and muttered, "The world has gone dotty." However, there it is. There is a right and a wrong way of doing things. Fascism means to have things done decently and in order, whatever men may say under their breath.

New Rome is to show the world how the ordinary citizen ought to live. For him it is erecting, with something of the American hustle, large blocks of attractive flats. These are built round a centre garden bright with flowers and flashing with the sparkle of the sun-lit fountain. Nearly five thousand such houses have been put up within the last four years, at a cost of seventy-five million dollars. No wonder one cannot get a workman to do a little plastering! Alas, it is the tenet of Fascism that the individual

must suffer for the community. Thirty million more dollars are being spent in planning a new Rome outside the walls, and leaving the ancient haunts for the tourists. In fact, a war is being waged between archæologists and the captains of commerce. The former are saying "Hands off", in their attempt to preserve ancient Rome from the demands of modern business. Very much has been lost; but here and there a determined stand is being made, and the archæologists have the sympathy and support of Mussolini.

The city is to be more than an incarnation of the spirit of Fascism; it is to be an *aspiration*. Rome casts a long shadow into the future, one which it is hoped will never grow less. Already the population is 800,000; increasing at the rate of 24,000 a year. But that is only half of what it once was in its palmy days. Fascism aspires to beat the record. As long as Rome reaches forth its borders, Mussolini, pointing to it as an emblem and turning to his followers, can exclaim, *Avanti!*

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THE FASCINATION OF SURPRISE.

The fascination of surprise is one of the lures of Rome. You never know what a day may turn up. A signature, which had been hidden for over two thousand years, has at last been found, and has given a priceless value to the old bronze figure which for all these centuries has so cunningly concealed its maker's name. "The Boxer" is not what you call a pretty statue. It is, perhaps, the most brutal and realistic specimen of art in existence. "The Dying Gladiator" is tame in comparison. Gross features, disfigured by bumps on forehead and cheek, the marks of his adversary's fists, a body all grown to muscle, with a head which is small and unintelligent, demonstrate in bronze the sculptor's idea of the triumph of the physical over the spiritual. It was found in the Baths of Caracalla, and now stands, or rather sits, for the posture is of one sitting wearily on a rock, with elbows resting on knees, in the National Museum of Sculpture in Rome. It is indexed as "The Boxer"; but some are inclined to think that it represents a gladiator, after the fight, with his armour off. He has won, but is too dazed by the many blows received to be conscious of anything except his exhaustion. The world of the old Roman arena is brought vividly before the modern tourist as he gazes on that relic of the past. He is introduced to its back-door life. Its brutality parades itself once more before the eyes of men in a figure repellent with the barbarism of an age which revelled in cruelty.

Who was this ancient war artist in sculpture that has left us this sketch of blood and muscle? That question has puzzled

critics through the centuries. The best answer they could give was that the work was Hellenistic; yet all the time the secret was actually within reach, and it was discovered the other day. Those who remember the bronze will recall that the fingers of one hand are bent over the other. On it is a knuckle-duster, and beneath it the old fellow had kept concealed the name of his maker. A thrill passed through all art circles when that name was disclosed. It was none other than Appollonius, the son of Nestor of Athens. What the modern world owes to him is beyond compute. It was to his other great work, the "Torso", that Michael Angelo ascribed his inspiration. He used to pass his hands over every sinew and muscle until the marble seemed to him to live. He considered it the most realistic representation of the human body in marble ever executed. It stands to-day in the Vatican Museum. Now it is revealed that this work has, so to speak, a brother, and that the bronze in the National Museum owns the same parentage. The "Torso" is only a fragment. It was unearthed near the Theatre of Pompey. In turn it unearthed the greatest pupil modern art ever had in the person of Michael Angelo. When we look on his realistic figures, which seem to be stepping out of the roof of the Sistine Chapel, we can now understand how great a man this Appollonius of the second century B. C. was to have begotten such a son.

This is by no means the first time that the sculptor has cunningly concealed his signature. There is a very good example of this which you can see any day in the church of San Lorenzo in Rome. Pliny, and a touch of humour, add to its interest. One, at least, of the old columns, and possibly most of them, had been filched from the temple of Jupiter or Juno, which stood near the portico of Octavia. This we know to-day from the curious signature of the artists who built those temples. Pliny tells the story. He may be a little hard on these two architects; and in this age of self-advertisement we cannot withhold some sympathy for their weakness. They were human. It was not all charity that induced them to make this offering to their gods. They wanted their names on the subscription list. When the temples were erected, they modestly asked that as donors they should have their names inscribed where all could see. Possibly they argued that it would be an incentive to others. Besides, there was a certain distinction about the sound of those names, "Sauros" and "Batrakos". They would look well in print. The authorities, however, did not take that view. They were ahead of modern times in their dislike of monograms scribbled on historic places. They had lived before the modern tourists; so, they said No!

But ambition is not easily crushed. Sauros and Batrakos took counsel together. They had set their minds on handing down to posterity the fame of their generosity. Their very names then suggested a cunning device by which they might outwit the jealous guardians. The Greek word for lizard is *saurites*, and for frog *batrachos*. So in the decorations of the capitals on the pillars they added the figures of a lizard and a frog; and the dull authorities never saw what we see to-day—the signatures of the two donors. Be sure your sins will find you out!

Another example of a hidden signature is to be found on the bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, which dominates the square of the Capitol. This art treasure of the past owes its present preservation to a mistaken identity. It used to stand in the Forum near the Column of Phocas; and at that period when Christian zeal expressed itself in a fury of destruction against all pagan relics, it would have shared the fate of its neighbours, had not the resemblance to Constantine suggested the thought that perhaps this was a statue of the Christian Emperor. So it was spared. It was removed to the Lateran Palace in A. D. 1187, and then placed in its present position by Michael Angelo in A. D. 1538. If you look closely between the horse's ears you will see a curious tuft of hair sticking up. From one point of view, it looks like the head of an owl. Here we have the signature of the sculptor. His name was the same as that of the bird.

Perhaps students of Shakespeare will take a hint from these discoveries of ancient methods of disguising a signature, and find that the great dramatist has not left his plays unsigned. The Baconians, in any case, know all about it.

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A CITY OF SURPRISING VISITORS:

No other city has attracted so many visitors as Rome. When we pass these in review, we get many surprises. One of them is to find the ubiquitous Scot there at the most unexpected time and in the most unexpected place. *MCCCCLXVII Quidam Scoti hic fuerunt* (In 1467 some Scots were here). That inscription was found in the bowels of the earth in an old catacomb. Truly there is reason for the exclamation: "The ubiquitous Scot!"

These unknown members of a wandering race were not the first, however, to leave their mark on Rome. There was a sturdy Scottish youth who, in the latter half of the fourth century, set out from his native land in pursuit of knowledge. Not the last of his breed to do that! The instinct for education was already mani-

festing itself in Scottish character. Like may a student who has walked all the way from his Highland home to Edinburgh, St. Ninian is supposed to have trudged to Rome. That required some courage and perseverance in those days. He doggedly remained an exile for several years until he had filled his brain with the material he sought, and then came back to Scotland to impart his learning to his fellow countrymen. It may not be generally known that in the "Westminster" of Rome, in that grandest of all crypts, sacred now as the last resting-place of Italy's kings, in that "glorious dome—Pantheon—pride of Rome, lies the body of a Scot. Again we exclaim "The ubiquitous Scot"!

How came he here? We may ask in surprise. He was a humble Scot, except in his own estimation. He had neither title nor wealth; yet there he lies beside kings. His name was common enough, simply Dr. Gibbs. He came to Rome shortly after Milton had paid his famous visit to the city, but in a much more humble guise, and began to practise as a physician. Scottish doctors early win their spurs. They have only to cross the borders of their country to become famous. Not much is related about the skill of Dr. Gibbs as a doctor; he seems to have known more about poetry than about medicine, and was busier concocting rhymes than remedies. About the only thing recorded of him is, in fact, that "he was an elegant writer of Latin poetry; a small selection of his poems was published at Rome, where he died in 1677, and was buried in the Pantheon." The Scot cannot be beaten for "getting there." Last year all Italy was stirred with emotion when it was decreed to give a burial place to the late beloved Queen Mother within the precincts of that august shrine; and as I witnessed that memorable procession moving towards its doors, I thought of the humble Scot who was sleeping within.

The Scot who came to Rome a hundred years later lived up to the reputation which Scots do not deserve. If you hid a bawbie, he could find it. Gavin Hamilton turned up in Rome about the year 1769, and proceeded to turn up Rome to some purpose and his own profit. He is credited with having had a very keen eye for the main chance, and for other matters as well. It was he who clandestinely transported the Elgin marbles out of Italy to England. A letter of his addressed to Lord Shelbourne on 16th July, 1772, gives his own character away, as well as relates how he got away some priceless treasures of art. He says: "As to the Antinous, I am afraid I shall be obliged to smuggle it, as I can never hope for a license". In a following letter he adds: "Since my last I have taken the resolution to send off the head of Antinous in the character of

Bacchus without a license. The under-antiquarian alone is in the secret, to whom I have made an additional present, and hope everything will go well." Bacchus without a license seems to savour of boot-legging. Has a Scot a special aptitude for that sort of thing, begotten of illicit stills? Anyhow, Gavin Hamilton got his "Bacchus" across the frontiers without discovery. Though he may have cheated the Customs, in the end he was the friend of Italy, and with his almost uncanny scent for hidden treasure has enriched Rome with untold wealth. As I take visitors through the galleries of the Vatican, and point to the famous Discobolus, or to the bust of Serapis, or to a hundred and one other priceless gems, I add, "Discovered by a Scotsman!"

Of course my subject would be incomplete without reference to a name which rises at once in the reader's mind, that of Stuart. In the vestibule of the Palazzo Balestra, in the Piazz degli Apostoli, there is a tablet commemorating "the last of the Stuart Dynasty". This was Henry, Cardinal York, the younger brother of Prince Charles. Why there is no mention of the more romantic figure of the elder brother, I do not know. The world worships success, and Prince Charlie was a failure.

There are some flowers which rush into bloom, and whose petals then wither, leaving the stalk bare. Such was the life of Prince Charlie. At one time all promise and hope, with a dash of personal qualities which charmed. Then came the withered petals, and a good many of these could be picked up on the streets of Rome. I never look on the cenotaph to the Stuarts in St. Peter's, and the tablet recording their names, without thinking that perhaps this is the most beautiful touch in all their histories; for it was the last gift of their rivals, the reigning Royal Family of Britain.