

It was a joyous time of good will and sharing. People in Rome exchanged gifts and made visits to family and friends. Candles and clay dolls were common gifts, as were dates, figs, honey, and money. Homes were decorated with laurel branches.

Christmas Holy days in Rome

Civita Vecchia - the "Eternal City" by Moonlight

It was in one of the most lovely nights ever seen under an Italian sky, that the steamer in which we had embarked from Genoa came within sight of the coast of the Papal dominions. The moon had risen in her queen-like beauty, and as she rode high above us in the heavens, every wave of the Mediterranean seemed tinged with her radiance. Felucca, polacre, xebec, and other strange-looking craft, were floating lazily on the sea, while our own vessel, as she glided through the blue waters, left a track of molten silver to mark her way. The cool fresh breeze which came sweeping over the sea was far more grateful than the heated air of the cabin, and we remained long on deck, seeing as we passed, on the one hand, Napoleon's miniature kingdom of Elba, and on the other, the long line of the main land, which owes submission to his Holiness, Gregory XVI.

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At sunrise the next morning we entered the harbor of Civita Vecchia, the nearest approach which can be made by sea to the city of Rome. The remaining distance, fifty-two miles, must be traveled by land. Ostia, the ancient port, in which during the days of the republic her galleys rode, where Scipio Africanus embarked for Spain, and Claudius for Britain, is indeed but sixteen miles from the city, and was formerly much nearer, but the gradual accumulation of sand has entirely destroyed its harbor, After it was sacked by the Saracens, in the fifth century, no attempt was made to restore it. The salt marshes which Livy mentions as existing in the days of Ancus Martius gradually



While Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea approximately 2000 years ago, Christmas didn't really become a common celebration until 300 years later. When the Roman Emperor Constantine adopted the Christian faith he ended the persecution of Christians.

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encroached on the one side, and the sand was drifted over it from the sea on the other, until this city, which once contained eighty thousand inhabitants, now has only about fifty souls living in wretchedness among its ruins. We passed it in the steamer some months afterwards on our way up from Naples; but the site is only marked by the remains of a temple and theatre almost concealed by brambles, and a picturesque old fortress erected during the middle ages, with two solitary pine-trees standing in front of it. And yet, this place was once a suburb of imperial Rome-from thence the old consuls went forth to victory, and there they landed to commence their triumphs as they entered the city.

Ci vita Vecchia, with its fortress erected from plans furnished by Michael Angelo, and its long ramparts, presents a striking view from the sea, which you find, on landing, the reality by no means justifies. It has, however, some traces of antiquity, for the massive stonework of its port was built under the direction of Trajan (the younger

Pliny describes it as the "Trajani Portus"), and here, as at Terracina, the bronze rings by which the Roman galleys were made fast to the quays still remain.

The immense prisons lining the basin have a bright appearance, which contrasts strangely with the gloomy object to which they are devoted. When we came on deck at dawn, the galley-slaves, in their parti-colored dresses, were just marching out to work, attended by a strong guard of soldiers. Their number is said to be nearly twelve hundred, and the clanking of their chains as they walked was the first sound which greeted us from the States of the Church.

The manner in which we were fleeced on all sides at this port of his Holiness was a foretaste of what we were to expect in Italy. You first pay sundry pauls for being rowed ashore from the steamer; several porters (facchini) seize your baggage, and unless you can squabble in Italian, you must bestow some more pauls on each for carrying it to the custom-house-more pauls to the officials there, for weighing it, to see whether or not it is beyond the allowable weight for the carriage-more for plumbing it, (that is, cording it up and fastening it with a lead seal, which is not to be taken off till you reach Rome,)-more for the printed permit to pass it through the gates when you leave-more for hoisting it up

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on the top of the carriage; and so you go on, paying away on the right and on the left, until your small change and patience are both exhausted. In this little catalogue is not included the fee to the custom-house officer, whose inspection was a mere pro forma business. He lifted the covers of our trunks, made a great flourish about the examination, in the course of which he opened a book (happening to be a controversial one on the Romish Church), and looked into it as curiously as if there was any probability of his understanding what it was, and then closed the trunks again. He next whispered to us, that "he should be happy to receive something, as we had been well served," turned his back, put his open hand behind him with a great affectation of secrecy, closed it as the expected pauls dropped in, and the farce was over. Add to this about a dollar for the use of each passport, and you have the history of the blackmail levied on us at Civita Vecchia in about two hours.

At noon we set out in a carriage drawn by three horses. "And so we went towards Rome." The road for one half of the distance skirts the Mediterranean through a region dreary and often uncultivated, though the last part, where it turns eastward into the country, becomes more hilly. One who looked only to the present would pronounce it a ride without interest, except where his curiosity was at times excited by some massive ruins near the road, or a lonely tower hanging over the sea, reminding him of days of feudal strife. But, as Walpole says, "our memory sees more than our eyes in this country;" The classical scholar, therefore, looks upon it as a land seamed and furrowed by the footsteps of past ages. He is in the midst of places of which Strabo and Pliny wrote. He crosses the Vaccina, the Amnis Cceretanus of his old school days. He passes through Cervetere, once one of the most important cities of ancient Etruria, where Virgil tells us Mezentius reigned when Eneas entered Italy; and the paintings in whose tombs, Pliny says, existed long before the foundation of Rome. It is supposed, indeed, that the Romans were first initiated in the mysteries of the Etruscan worship by the priests of Ceere: and, when Rome was invaded by the Gauls, it was here that the vestal virgins found an asylum, and were sent for safety with the sacred fire. Every scene, indeed, has its separate story; and old memories of the past are crowding back on the traveler's mind, as he hears names which are associated with all he knows of classical interest.

It is something, too, to be riding along the shores of the Mediterranean. Its waves are haunted by the spirit of the past. We see them sparkling at our feet, or stretching out to the horizon, blue and beautiful in the sunlight, and we remember what countries they lave. Opposite to us is Africa, where St. Augustine once ruled, and hundreds of temples reared the Cross on high-then comes Egypt, with its hoary antiquity, by the side of which Italy is young and childlike-then that holy land which our Lord "enviored with his blessed feet," and where Paradise was Lost and was Regained. On we pass to old Tyre, where, as prophecy foretold, the nets are drying on the rocks, and onward again, till we behold the waters breaking in the many bays of Greece. There was the last foothold of the "faded hierarchy" of Olympus; and now, though songs are hushed and dances stilled in that land, yet beauty has everywhere left the wonderful tokens of her presence. And to the shores, too, where we are, the waves of this sea have borne one race after another from the far East, and seen the feeble colonies expand into greatness, until their children went forth to inherit the earth. What wonderful memories then linger around this mighty "valley of waters!" *

The last few miles were over the silent and de solate Campagna-low stunted trees only at times were seen, and not a habitation gave notice that we were drawing nigh to a mighty city. Far as the eye can reach is an unbroken waste, and the Mistress of the World stands encircled by a melancholy solitude. Yet is it not appropriate that it

should be so? About fair Naples are lovely vineyards, lining the road with the rich festoons they have hung from tree to tree; and from whichever side you approach beautiful Florence, whether from the smiling fields of Tuscany, or "leafy Valombrosa," or the woody heights of Fiesole, where Milton mused and wrote, there is still the same rich and lively scenery. All things are in unison with the gay and poetical character of these cities. Should not Rome, then, the fallen metropolis of the earth, majestic even in ruins, be surrounded only by barrenness and decay? Every object should inspire thoughts of awe and melancholy, as we approach this "Niobe of nations," standing thus

"Childless and crownless in her voiceless woe."

It was late at night when we reached the neighborhood of "the eternal city;" but the moon was up, shedding its light over the whole landscape, and we waited with eager impatience for our first view of the Mistress of the World. At length it came. "ROMA!" shouted the postillion, and at once all heads were thrust through the carriage windows. Towers and turrets, columns and cupolas, rose before us, and high above all, the majestic dome of St. Peter's mounting in the air. We were approaching the Porta Cavalligieri, immediately in the rear of that miracle of architecture. A few moments more and we reached it- our passports were inspected by the guard-we entered, and were within the walls of Rome. Our carriage drove round close to the mighty colonnades of St. Peter's, stretched out far on both sides as if embracing the vast arena they enclose-then rose before us, with its massive towers, the Castle of St. Angelo, once the mighty tomb

*"Which Hadrian rear'd on high,
Imperial mimic of old Egypt's piles."*

We crossed the Tiber, as it sluggishly wound along in the calm moonlight, by the ancient Pons Jelius, and around us on every side was the magnificence of which we had heard from our earliest years. - a magnificence which still survives the wreck of "al'S and violence, and rapine and earthquake, and conflagrations and floods. All was the more grand and solemn because not seen in the glare of day. The delusive visionary light and deep broad shadows enlarged every portico, increased the height of every dome and tower, and left the imagination to fill up the gigantic outline they revealed. And thus, we felt, should Rome be seen for the first time!