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978-1-108-00382-7 - Italy: Remarks Made in Several Visits, from the Year 1816 to 1854, Volume 2

John Cam Hobhouse

Excerpt

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I T A L Y.

REMARKS MADE IN SEVERAL VISITS

FROM THE YEAR 1816 TO 1854.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CAPITOL.

RUIN and restoration have entirely effaced every vestige of the domicil of all the gods. The greatest uncertainty hangs over this hill. On which side stood the citadel, on which the great temple of the Capitol—and did the temple stand in the citadel?* Read everything that has been written on the topography of a spot four hundred yards in length, and two hundred in breadth, and you will know nothing. Four temples, fifteen chapels (ædes), three altars, the great rock, a fortress, a library, an athenæum, an area covered with statues, the enrolment office, all these are to be arranged in the above space: and of these the last only can be with precision assigned to the double row of vaults corroded with salt, where the inscription of Catulus was dis-

* Nardini, lib. v. cap. xiv. Donatus and he are at issue. The division of Ryequius into Arx, Capitolium, and Saxum, does not make his book a bit more clear.

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covered. The Athenæum, perhaps, may have been where the prisons and senator's palace now stand. The Tarpeian rock is divided, by the beggars who inhabit the cottages, between the two angles towards the Tiber; the highest is that called Monte Caprino,* behind the gallery of the Conservators' palace; the most abrupt is the corner at the other end of the same Conservators' palace. Which of these two is the actual precipice whence the traitors were thrown, has not been yet resolved. The citadel may be believed to have extended along the whole side of the hill.†

The great capitoline temple was placed by Nardini on the Araceli; but doubts have again shaken this presumption, and the Feretrian Jupiter has put in his claim to that elevation. An earlier topographer men-

* But, in order to judge of the pretensions of this angle, you must walk up a lane from the Via del Tor de' Specchi, which is called "Via del Rupe Tarpejo," until you come close under the hill, and see the only naked rock observable on the whole mount: a sketch of it is given in Dr. Smith's Dictionary (p. 771). If the ground were cleared away to the ancient level, the rock would be high enough for the old Tarpejan executions; nevertheless, the writer of the article in the Dictionary decides in favour of the other angle, now called popularly the Roccha Tarpeja, overlooking the Janus towards the Tiber. It is very distinctly seen from the Farnese gardens on the Palatine, just above the church of Sta. Maria della Consolazione. Nibby has no doubts on this point; and I confess I think Mr. Dyer's arguments in favour of this view unanswerable.

† Indeed, some of the large stones which served for the bulwarks of the hill on the side of the Monte Caprino were discovered in the time of Vacca, when the whole hill was called the Tarpejan Mount, as we may infer from an inscription of Pope Alexander's time in the church of St. Joseph above the prison.

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tions a church of *St. Salvator in Maximis*, looking* towards the west, as occupying the site of the temple, and such a title, if existing now, might aid us in our conjectures. But no such church now remains.

The revolutions of Rome were first felt on this hill. The Sabines, the Gauls, the republicans, the imperialists, the citizens of papal Rome, have all contended for dominion on the same narrow spot. After the repairs of Domitian † it appears that the citadel was lost in a mass of golden-roofed fanes, and the word *Capitol* seems to have been synonymous with the temple. ‡ From that time the triumphs and studies of peace were celebrated and pursued amidst the trophies of victory. Poets were crowned with *oaken* wreaths, § libraries were collected, schools opened, and professors taught rhetoric, from the reign of Hadrian to that of Theodosius the Younger. It is possible that part of the establishment mentioned in a law published by Valentinian III. and Theodosius II. may refer to Constantinople. || There were, however, public schools in the Capitol. Three Latin rhetoricians,

* Fabricius :—" In ea Capitolii parte quæ occasum versus forum Holitorium respicit."—*Descrip. Urb. Roma*, cap. ix. That is, on the side exactly contrary to Aracæli.

† The gilding alone cost 12,000 talents, above two millions and a half sterling. See note 45 to cap. xvi. *Decline and Fall*, tom. ii. p. 413, 8vo.

‡ "Auratum squalet Capitolium."—Hieron. in loco cit. ap. Note to Stanza lxxx.

§ *Decline and Fall*, cap. lxx. notes 10, 11, tom. xii. p. 327.

|| Tiraboschi, *Storia della Lett. Ital.*, tom. ii. lib. iv. p. 387.

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five Greek sophists, ten Latin and ten Greek grammarians, formed a respectable university.

The change of religion bedimmed the glory of the Domitian Capitol, but did not destroy the structures, as Winkelmann heedlessly supposed.* The first despoilment is, however, to be attributed to the piety or rapacity of Stilicho. Genseric is the next recorded plunderer; but Theodoric does not appear to have missed the gilding of the doors, or the tiles of the half uncovered roof of the great temple, or the chain of the goddess Rhea. In his time “the ascent of the *High Capitols* furnished a sight surpassing all that the human imagination could conceive.”† How long these wonders were spared is unknown. It is probable that the robbery of the Emperor Constans extended to the ornaments of the capitoline temples; but an antiquary of great note has thought himself able to discover the temple of Jupiter as late as the eighth or ninth century.‡

The hill does not reappear for ages, but seems to have been put to its ancient use, if it be true that the antipope, John, was thrown from the Tarpeian rock at the end of

* *Storia delle Arti*, &c., lib. xii. cap. iii. tom. ii. p. 419, note a. He went solely on the words of Saint Jerome, on which Baronius had observed long before, “*Verum non sic quidem concidisse affirmat Capitolini Jovis templum, quod dirutum hoc anno fuerit, sed quod ornamentis tantum modo expoliatum.*”—*Annal. Eccles.* ad an. 389, tom. vi. p. 51, edit. Lucæ. 1740.

† “*Capitolia celsa conscendere hoc est humana ingenia superata vidisse.*”—Cassiod. *Form. comitiv. formar. urbis*, lib. vii. p. 113.

‡ Bianchini: but he gives no reason for his conjecture.

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the tenth century.* It was again a strong place, and the Corsi family had fortified it, or occupied its fortifications, in the course of the next hundred years. Their houses on the hill were thrown down by the emperor Henry IV. in 1084, and Guiscard soon afterwards levelled whatever remained of the fortress.†

In 1118, however, it was still the place of assembly. The friends of pope Gelasius II. and the *Heads of the regions* are said to have mounted into the Capitol, to rescue him from Cencio Frangipane.‡ In that century the Capitol is crowned with churches, and in the possession of monks. Araceli and St. John the Baptist, the monastery of the Benedictines (who were settled there by the anti-pope Anaclete II. about 1130 or 1134); some gardens and mean houses and shops had succeeded to the pagan temples and to the feudal towers.§

At the revolution of Arnold of Brescia (1143, 1144), in the same century, the Capitol was naturally selected for the restoration of the senate and the equestrian

* Dissertazione sulle Rovine, p. 330, note A. There seems some doubt here. Muratori, ad an. 998, tom. v. p. 509, is much amused at a story of Peter Damian's, that the anti-pope had his eyes bored out, his ears cut off, and his tongue also cut off, and being then put on an ass, with his face to the tail, which he held in his hand, was paraded about Rome, and obliged to exclaim, "Such is the deserving punishment of him who endeavours to expel the pope of Rome from his seat." Damian tells this, with the exception of the tongue cut out; a Saxon annalist tells it with the exception of the exclamation; so that the joke is only in Muratori's confusion.

† See previous account of the destruction of Roman Remains.

‡ Annali d' Italia, tom. vi. p. 389.

§ Dissertazione, &c., p. 357, 358.

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order. The hill became the seat of the revolutionary government, and we find Pope Lucius II., in 1145, repulsed and killed with a stone in an attempt to drive the people from their post.* The rebuilding of the capitoline citadel† was part of the proposed reform, and appears to have been carried, partially at least, into effect. From this period the Capitol resumed something of its importance, and, if those who saw it may be trusted, of its splendour. The people held a consultation there ‡ before they attacked Frederic Barbarossa in 1155.

It appears in the transactions of the subsequent centuries as the centre of the city. The duties and ceremonies of the recovered senate, or senator, were rendered more respectable by being performed on the site of ancient dominion, and whilst the tomb of Hadrian was regarded with jealousy and affright, the tenant of the Capitol was looked upon as the lawful master of Rome. Here Rienzi planted the standard of the good estate—here Petrarch was crowned. The popular assemblies were convoked on this hill. The bell of the great tower was the signal of alarm, and was thought to watch over the new liberties of the Romans. The tolling is often heard in the night of those unhappy ages.

The importance of this station was fatal to the new

* *Annali d' Italia*, tom. vi. p. 480.

† “Andava costui (Arnold of Brescia) predicando che si dovea rifabbricare il campidoglio.”—*Annali d' Italia*, tom. vi. p. 481.

‡ *Annali, &c.*, tom. vi. p. 517.

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citadel, which, after being frequently assaulted and taken in the quarrels of the barons and the people, and the popes, seems to have lost all appearance of a fortress in the beginning of the fifteenth century. But the people were still summoned to the hill in the tumults which followed the death of King Ladislaus* in 1414, and a house for the tribunals of the senator and his conservators was built upon the ancient enrolment office of Catulus.† Hear what was then the condition of the hill from a Roman, who, after describing its ancient glories, exclaims, “But now, besides the brick-house built for the use of the senator and his assessors by Boniface IX.,‡ and raised upon ruins, and such as an old Roman citizen of moderate fortune would have despised; besides the church of Araceli, belonging to the brothers of the blessed Francis, constructed on the foundation of the temple of the Feretrian Jupiter, there is nothing to be seen on this Capitoline, or Tarpeian mountain, adorned once with so many noble

* Vendettini. Serie cronologica, &c., p. 75, 76.

† At the angle where the prisons now are a portion of the old structure is still preserved; and a still better specimen may be seen within the doorway immediately leading to the prisons. The portico of the Tabularium is so cased in the modern wall that, although distinctly seen, and one of the few certain remains, it produces less effect than any of the Roman antiquities.

‡ The towers of the Capitol were the work of this Pope, the fortifier of the Castle of St. Angelo; and an inscription under his picture, in the Borgian apartments at the Vatican, boasts of this exploit as the true foundation of the papal power.

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edifices.”* In this picture of desolation may be inserted the fragments of marble recorded by Poggio, and the cottages which served for the shops of the artisans who frequented the Wednesday market held there, until transferred, in 1477, to the Piazza Navona.†

The present state of the Capitol dates from the pontificate of Paul III. On the establishment of the papal power the castle of St. Angelo was to be the only fortress, and the genius of Michael Angelo was employed to make the ancient citadel not only accessible but inviting.‡ The broad and easy ascent, the façade and steps of the senatorial palace, the lateral edifices have accomplished this object; but they accord ill with our preconceptions of the Roman Capitol. It should, however, be recollected, that although the area may have

* “Nunc vero præter lateritiam domum a Bonifacio IX. ruinis superædificatam qualem mediocris olim fastidissit Romanus civis usibus senatoris et causidicorum deputatam; præter Aræceli fratrum beati Franc. ecclesiam in Feretrii Jovis templi fundamentis extructam, nihil habet is Capitolinus Tarpeiusve mons tantis olim ædificiis exornatus.”—Flav. Blond. *Rom. Inst.*, lib. i. fol. 10, edit. 1527.

† “Eodem anno et mense essendosi più volte ordinato lo consiglio nel Palazzo de’ Conservatori, che si dovesse fare lo mercato di Mercordi nella Piazza di Nagoni, *tandem* lo mercato fu cominciato alli tredici dio Settembre dello detto anno (1477).”—Steph. Infess. *Diar. Rom. ap. Script. Rer. Ital.*, tom. iii. par. ii. p. 1146.

‡ Gregory XIII. added the ornaments on the balustrade—the Castor and Pollux, and horses, which were found in the time of Pius IV., where the synagogue now stands in the Borghetto. Pius IV. supplied the basalt lions. See Vacca, p. 54. Sixtus V. transferred the trophies—absurdly called of Marius—to this spot, and the same pontiff added the two Constantines. Of the two milestones only one is ancient.

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been partially levelled, the principal eminence is probably as high as that of the ancient hill. The tops of the buildings below were on a level with the base of the Capitoline structures in the reign of Vitellius, and the ascent was by a hundred steps,* which could hardly rise higher than the 124 steps of the church of Araceli. Calpurnius, in his seventh eclogue, says that the top of the Coliseum towered above the Tarpeian rock. We can account for that rock appearing less terrific than might be expected, since a large piece of it, as big as a house of ample magnitude,† fell down in the reign of Eugenius IV. The Caffarelli palace and other edifices conceal the form of the summit itself.

Araceli, whether on the site of the great temple or not, preserves the post which it occupied eight centuries ago. The Benedictines made way for the Franciscans in 1252, and popes and cardinals have been ambitious to contribute to the dignity of the substitute. The corporation, calling itself the Roman People,‡ affected to

* “Scandentes per conjuncta ædificia : quæ ut in multa pace, in altum edita, solum Capitolii æquabant.”—Taciti. Hist., lib. iii. cap. lxi. “Et qua Tarpeja rupes centum gradibus aditur.”—Ibid. Probably winding up from the corner under the Monte Caprino. See Smith’s Dictionary, art. Rome—“But their exact situation it is impossible to point out” (p. 772). I have elsewhere noticed their supposed site. —

† “Rupis Tarpeia, cujus pars maxima domus amplæ magnitudinis æquiparanda proximis diebus collapsa est.”—Flav. Blond. *ibid.*, lib. ii. fol. 22.

‡ Venuti, *Descrizione, &c., di Rom. Mod.*, tom. ii. p. 341, edit. 1766.

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emulate, in behalf of this church, the splendours of Catulus and Domitian, and gilded the whole interior roof, in gratitude for the victory obtained over the Turks in 1571. On the return of Marc Anthony Colonna from the victory of Lepanto, on the 16th of December in that year, he was received in triumph in the Capitol, and Araceli was the new temple which served, instead of the Jove, Best and Greatest, to receive the vows of the Christian conqueror. The religious community amounted to 400, when the French dispersed them and reduced their treasures to the base of the altar, which Augustus Cæsar erected to the First-born of God, and to the picture of the Virgin painted by St. Luke.* The restored remnant is only a hundred.†

* Venuti (Descrizione, *ibid.*) has the grace to say, “Un altare che *pretendesi* eretto da Augusto, col titolo *d’ ara Primogeniti Dei.*”

† The festival of their sixth hundredth anniversary was celebrated on the 3rd of October (1842), and the two following days: on that occasion the hundred and twenty-four marble steps of the ascent to Araceli were blackened with an assemblage as numerous as ever worshipped at the shrine of the Capitoline Jove. The façade of the church itself was decorated with coloured lamps, and the interior of the building was brilliantly illuminated; but the show was rendered still more theatrical by a transparency behind the high altar representing St. Francis as large as life, standing in a golden cloud, amidst a blaze of glory, with angels above and cherubims below, each of them holding his palm and harp, whilst the real musicians praised the saint from behind a laticed tribune in front of the episcopal throne. The spectacle without the church was not rendered more imposing by the retailers of a halfpenny prayer of St. Francis, which, however, found purchasers amongst the highest and most dignified of the worshippers.