

## LETTERS OF AN ARCHITECT.

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### LETTER XXXI.

ROME.

*Rome, May, 1817.*

OUR present walk must include a larger circuit than the former. We pass through the Piazza Barberini, and along the Via di San Basilio, which will presently lead us beyond the inhabited district of the city, and an Englishman begins to feel himself in the country, though within the walls. Here is the Villa Ludovisi, but it is difficult to gain admission; we therefore turn to the right, and at the Viccolo delle Fiamme, enter into the gardens, which, like those passed through by Aladdin, in the Arabian Nights, are not divided by fences from one another, but merely secured on the part towards the road. The first thing which offers itself to our observation is a fragment of a wall of large stones, said to be a remnant of that built by Tarquinius Superbus, which was itself a restoration in more solid masonry, of the one first erected by Servius Tullius, to include the Quirinal within the circuit of Rome. A little farther we trace distinctly the form of the circus of Sallust, which occupies a continuation of the hollow between the Pincian and Quirinal hills; and close by it, but not uniformly in a parallel direction, is a series of arches and substructions supporting the hill; but the fragment of Tarquinius Superbus seems to have nothing to do, either with the circus or with these substructions. It is a trifle in itself, but its antiquity gives it interest, and more is said to have been disclosed by digging. At some distance, along the foot of the substructions abovementioned, and close

upon the circus, we reach the Temple of Venus Erycina (let the antiquaries quarrel about the name, I use that by which it is commonly distinguished). The principal part consists of a circular, domed chamber, almost buried in the earth and rubbish which has descended from the hill above, with a small semicircular niche, and two square recesses on each side, two of which are open, and give admission to the building. The principal entrance is from a little vestibule, by means of a large arch; and a corresponding arch, with a similar vestibule, opens to the deep cell or adytum of the temple; both these arches interrupt the line of the springing of the dome. This and the other fragments abound in reticulated work.

Issuing from the vineyards, and crossing the long street of the Porta Pia, we may follow the Via del Macao, to look at a house built under the direction of Milizia; but though an able writer on architecture, he was not a good architect.

Our next object will be the Fontana di Termini, the water of which is called Felice, from the name of Sixtus the Fifth, before his elevation to the pontificate; since by him the water was conducted from Colonna to Rome, and this fountain erected under the direction of Fontana. You are surprised both at the quantity of water, and the display of architecture at these Roman fountains. Here are four Ionic columns, with three niches in the intercolumns, from which the water issues; and so far the architectural composition is good, but above there is a pedestal, made of a most disproportionate size, in order to receive the great letters of the inscription, and over that a sort of circular pediment, and other ornaments, which are quite sickening. The sculpture in the niches is large and conspicuous, but in bad taste, and the two beautiful Egyptian lions of basalt, which adorn the lower part, are the most estimable part of the composition. Even these are ill used by the insertion of small pipes, through which they awkwardly squirt out a little water.

Santa Maria della Vittoria just by, in the Strada di Porta Pia, if not one of the beautiful, is at least one of the rich churches of Rome. It was built by Carlo Maderno, who has used a Sicilian alabaster of a dark brown colour, which is not a good material for architecture, and overcharged it with gilding and ornaments. There is even a pretence of forming the doors of this alabaster, which is in bad taste. Doors should either be of wood or metal. The door of a tomb alone, which is sup-

## BATHS OF DIOCLESIAN.

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posed to open only once in two or three years, may be permitted to be of marble. The church is not visited so much for its architecture, as for some fine paintings of Domenichino, Guercino, and Guido;\* and for a Santa Teresa in marble by Bernini, which is said to be his masterpiece. The saint is supposed to be dying in the ecstasies of divine love, but the figure wants nature, and the death is a smirking angel, with a gilt dart. Under the principal altar, (which is very rich and very ugly) are preserved the bones of some female saint, I forget who, covered up in a waxen image, and this is gaily dressed in blue and white satin; because, as the priest who conducted me round the church, judiciously observed, the skeleton was a black and disagreeable object, very inconsistent with the appearance of such an elegant altar.

We now pass to the baths of Dioclesian, the remains of which are more considerable than those of any other of the ancient thermæ. These ruins still contain two churches, one of which is dedicated to San Bernardo. It is a small, circular building, placed just at the angle of the outer inclosure, but all the ancient ornaments are gone, except the naked panelling of the dome, and this has been covered with modern stucco. It is in octagons and small squares. There are thirty-two octagons in the circumference, which makes them too small, especially in the upper part. The order in this temple is perhaps rather too high in proportion to the building. The *cornice architravata*, with which it terminates, has hardly the dimensions of a good architrave, and then comes the dome and its panels, without any interval. The comparison of this with the Pantheon, where the order is too small, may lead us to the just proportions. To avoid the expense of carving, the ornaments are painted on the stucco, and have either been badly executed, or they have faded. The choir forms a deep recess, of which the arched opening is perhaps rather too high, but not so as to interrupt the circular cornice of the order. The effect of the organ, and of the voices of the choir issuing from this recess, appeared to me particularly fine. From the convent behind, we see the remains of the theatre, and one may sometimes obtain admission into the garden which contains it, but there is little to deserve notice. Another circular building corresponding with this, is used as a granary.

The principal object remaining in these baths is the great hall, now

\* The Guido has since been sold.

converted into the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli. This was performed under M. A. Buonarroti, who made the principal entrance at the end. Vanvitelli, the last of the celebrated architects of Italy, re-opened the ancient entrance on the side, and by uniting the circular vestibule with the chief room, and adding a choir on the opposite side, he gave the church length in that direction. The four side niches have been filled up, and the length, or what is now the width, is increased, by opening into it two other chambers. In its present state, the great hall, with the two additional rooms, forms a transept; but as this hall constitutes, on every account, the principal feature of the place, it ought certainly to form the nave, and the alteration was injudicious. We do not expect great purity of taste in the time of Dioclesian, yet the details are by no means contemptible, and the largeness and boldness of the parts produce a great appearance of magnificence.

The first room which we now enter is a circular vestibule, where the supine arches of the four openings are particularly offensive, because they are very large in proportion to the building; some scheme arches in the great hall are also disagreeable, but the hall itself is a noble room, and produces the full effect of its large dimensions. There is a pleasure arising from these large and simple parts, which it is impossible to describe, and which I long in vain to communicate to you. The old work is generally distinguishable from the modern additions; indeed, no pains have been taken to copy exactly the antique. Of the principal columns, four have Corinthian, and four Composite capitals; and this seems to have been originally the case, though the columns themselves are now, some of granite, and some of stuccoed brickwork. The groined vaulting is whitewashed, and has no ornament, except the brass knobs to which the lamps were anciently suspended.

The ground of the church has been raised, because it was damp; we wonder why it should not rather have been drained, since the situation is elevated. The present want of height is a sensible defect; it does not, I think, exceed two-thirds of the width, and perhaps was not originally more than three-fourths. I would by no means attempt in this style of architecture to emulate the proportionate height of the Gothic, whose peculiar character requires great elevation; but the height ought not to *appear* less than the width, and therefore should probably a little exceed it. If it is more than this, it should be sufficiently increased to make the

## TEMPLE OF MINERVA MEDICA.

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height the characteristic of the room, the dimension which first impresses itself on the observer. Intermediate proportions would be inferior to either; it is not in architecture alone that half measures fail.

From the church we may visit the convent, both for its ancient fragments, and its modern architecture. It contains a large square, of which the centre is adorned by some noble cypresses, and the surrounding cloisters are said to be the production of M. Angelo. The disposition of the kitchen chimney in this convent pleased me much; it is a deep recess lighted by two windows, and having the stoves placed along the middle. Besides the general flue to take off the steam, &c. there are some smaller ones for the smoke.

Proceeding from these baths to the extremity of the Via del Macao, we find in a vineyard, a mound of earth said to be part of the *agger* of Servius Tullius, and the range of arches stretching towards the gate of San Lorenzo, is part of the Marcian aqueduct, now carrying the Acqua Felice; but I shall reserve aqueducts and gates to a future letter, and pass on to the church of Santa Bibiena, where there are some ancient columns, and a statue of the saint by Bernini. It has been much admired, but like so many other works of this artist, fails in the want of apparent ease and simplicity of nature. By a gate which is not always open, we may pass into the inclosure containing the ruin, usually called the temple of Minerva Medica, rising in the midst of artichokes and brocoli. The principal remain is a large, domed, decagonal hall, a form not common in the Roman antiquities, with nine large niches, each occupying almost the whole of their respective sides, the tenth being the situation of the doorway; and a window over each. The dome is partly destroyed, and the remaining portion perforated in many places, shewing the ancient construction to have been formed by ribs tending to a centre, while the intervals are filled up with rubble. There are some remains of other rooms adjoining. The whole is overgrown with the lentiscus and other shrubs and plants. It forms a picturesque object, but it seems impossible to determine its primitive destination.

Near this is the Columbarium, or sepulchre of the Aruntian family. You may think there is little resemblance between a tomb and a dove-cot, but this name arises from the little recesses, compared to pigeon-holes, which contain the cinerary urns. It is, I believe, the most perfect of any remaining, and accessible about Rome, but it is seldom that any body is

in the way, to exhibit it, and I have not yet been able to obtain admission. We leave this vineyard just by the Porta Maggiore, and passing under the beautifully built, brick arch of the Claudian aqueduct, continue our walk to the Temple of Venus and Cupid, which stands in the garden of a convent. A part of the great niche is nearly all of this which is left standing. Some of the brick facing remains, and a few other foundations of walls, little above ground. The shattered piers and arches of the ancient aqueducts exhibited in these gardens, are perhaps more interesting than the fragment of the temple. By this, is the church of the holy cross, which I have already described to you, as that of the Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, and the Anfiteatro Castrense, which I mean to describe with the city wall, of which it forms part. We then pass under the wall among rows of trees, on turf now covered with the *Anemone hortensis*, to the church of St. John Lateran, stopping by the way to look at the Triclinium and the Scala Santa. After passing these objects we arrive at the baptistery of Constantine; the obelisk, which is the largest in Rome, and the hospital; a fine establishment, but according to the Roman theory, subject to mal aria nearly as much as the larger receptacle at Santo Spirito, which is under the Vatican and close to the Tiber, while this is in an elevated and airy situation. From this we follow a narrow, winding, and unfrequented lane, which will lead us under the ancient arch of Dolabella and Silanus, consuls under Augustus, in the year of Rome 763. It was of travertine, but it has been eked out with brickwork under Nero, in order to make it carry a portion of the Aqua Claudia from the Cœlian hill to the Palatine.

The Church of San Stefano rotondo is a curious edifice, which has been supposed by some, to have been a temple of Faunus, or of Claudius; others say, with every appearance of reason, that it was no temple at all; but when they proceed to state that it was a market, I follow them with less confidence. The body, or most elevated part, consists of a circular wall supported on twenty columns and two piers. The columns are not all of a size, but on an average are about four diameters apart, and about eight and a half high. The architrave, frieze, and cornice united, only form a sort of architrave, of perhaps one diameter and a half; yet it does not look so much oppressed by the great wall above, as the engravings we have of it give us reason to expect. Faulty and defective as it is, it perhaps might serve as a lesson, that a wall rising immediately on

the architrave of a circular colonnade, would not have an unpleasing effect; and that with this simple arrangement, a height equal to the width, would be quite sufficient. At present the building is singularly spoilt, by a wall running across the middle of it, apparently to support the roof; but it is in fact as useless as it is ugly. This wall is open below, with three arches resting on the side walls, and on two Corinthian columns. The capitals of the circular colonnade are Ionic, various, but all bad, and the bases of all forms. The two middle columns are very fine, with good bases, and Corinthian capitals. The cross wall is conjectured not to have been a part of the original building, but nobody knows when it was added. A double aisle surrounds this central part, divided by a range of columns, which are smaller than those of the first circle, and not disposed so as to have any correspondence with them. The outer circuit is a plain wall, but part of the second aisle is divided into chapels. It is completely a building made up with the spoils of others, and the few restorations are miserably executed; circumstances which favour the idea that it was erected in the time of Constantine. It is too bad for us to believe it of an earlier date, and after him, few if any public buildings were executed in Rome, except churches. The piety or superstition of the times seems to have continued the erection of these during the darkest and most unhappy periods of falling Italy; yet there seems to be a deficiency, even of religious structures, from the beginning of the fourth, till towards the end of the seventh century, when a new character and new relations began to develop themselves.

At a very little distance from the church of San Stefano, is the Navicella, a marble boat, placed by Leo the Tenth in front of a church which receives its name from it, but where Leo found it, I cannot tell you. The church was designed by Raphael; a range of five arches forms a sort of portico, above which rises the nave, corresponding in width to three of these arches, and finishing with a pediment. The simplicity of the design, and its apparent correspondence with the internal structure, produce a pleasing effect; but instead of one large window in the end of the nave, Raphael has introduced three small ones, of which the middle is circular, and the composition is sadly spoilt by them. Giulio Romano was employed in painting the internal friezes.

After leaving the Navicella, we may visit the Church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, enriched like so many others, with antique columns of granite and

marble, both in the portico and in the nave. I have already mentioned the antiquities in the convent. Continuing our walk along the lane on the side of the church, we pass between massive substructions, and in the garden adjoining there are considerable remains, principally I believe, of the aqueduct of Nero, which is a branch of the Claudian. Piranesi places here the Nymphæum of Nero, with which he unites the Vivarium built by Domitian; here also the house of Scaurus is supposed to have stood, and these fragments may be parts of one or the other, or perhaps of both. Issuing from this lane, we turn to the left, and ascend to the Church of San Gregorio, which is preceded by one of those courts, or atria, which you know I always admire; but in this there is nothing particularly good, beyond the general disposition. The grand object here is not the church, but an adjoining chapel dedicated to St. Andrew, which is one of three united together, but having no communication with the church. This chapel is adorned with two frescos, (not to mention minor objects) one of which represents the flagellation of the saint, by Domenichino, and the other his adoration of the cross, previous to his martyrdom, by Guido. They are very fine, but they are beginning to suffer.

Descending from the church of San Gregorio towards the south-west, we reach the southern angle of the Palatine, where the Septizonium formerly stood. It was destroyed by Sixtus the Fifth, and the columns, and probably some of the other materials, were employed in the Vatican. Antiquaries have imagined from the name, that seven successive orders must have been employed here, not reflecting that three orders would produce the appearance of seven zones or bands. First, the pedestal on which the whole is placed, which forms a solid mass; then a range of columns and voids; then another solid mass composed of the entablature of the first order, and the continued plinth and pedestals of the second. The fourth zone would be composed of the columns of the second order, and the voids between them; these open bands having always a different character and appearance from the solid ones, however composed. The fifth of the entablature and pedestals as before, or if there were no pedestals, by the entablature alone. These solid zones would have the appearance of being striped horizontally by the shadows of the mouldings, while the columns would give to the open bands the appearance of being striped vertically. Sixthly, the columns of the third order. Seventhly, the entablature, and whatever might crown the edifice, and this disposition is exactly corre-



spondent with the idea we entertain of the building from old engravings.

In this part, and along the south-western side of the hills, the remains on the Palatine are very considerable, consisting of lofty piers, and extended arches, but every trace of ornamental architecture has disappeared. Here also we find all that is to be seen of the Circus Maximus, *i. e.* the general form, favoured by the natural shape of the ground between the Palatine and Aventine hills. I shall not occupy you with any long dissertation on the ancient circus, or on the obscure god Consus, to whom it was dedicated. You know that the general form, in spite of the name, was that of an oblong, with one semicircular end; the other end was not straight, but somewhat curved and inclined, in order as much as possible to put each chariot which started from it, in an equally advantageous situation, and the *spina* was not placed either precisely in the centre, or exactly parallel to the sides, but in such a manner as to form a road continually narrower as the chariots proceeded in the circuit. A few burrs of rubble-work, and fragments of nearly buried arches, the foundations of the *sedili*, are all the remains. And now, leaving the baths of Caracalla and the tomb of the Scipios, for the subjects of a future letter, we will cross the Aventine, a hill divided into two summits, on which are the two churches of Santa Prisca, and Santa Saba, and a ruined convent, from which there is a fine view of Rome, and which is itself a very picturesque object. Both these churches contain ancient columns; that of Santa Saba is said in the guide-book, to have twenty-five, two of which are of black porphyry. I found fourteen in the nave, not all alike. Most of the capitals are Ionic, but of different sizes, some pretty well executed, but much degraded; others originally bad; some are merely bossed out, and have never been finished: one is Corinthian, and one is Composite. There are said to be others built up in the wall, but they must be very small. About the altar, are two columns which seem to be chiefly of quartz, but with spots of hornblende, and two of a dark veined marble, but what is meant by black porphyry I do not know. Those of dark marble have Composite capitals, which Uggeri says are of serpentine, but I did not particularly observe them. The front exhibits a gallery of small columns, standing on a high unadorned wall. The contrast is *piquant*, but perhaps more so where the form is circular, as at the back of Santi Giovanni e Paolo.

On descending the Aventine we have Monte Testaccio in full view. It

is a hill 260 feet high, made of potsherds. The meadows in which it stands, are the property of the Roman people, and the scene of many of their festivities. One corner of them forms a burying-ground for heretics, just under the pyramid of Caius Cestius. Who it was that provided for himself such a conspicuous sepulchre, is not determined; but this work of three hundred and thirty days, does not impress one with any great ideas of magnificence; yet it is 113 feet high, and certainly forms a great mass of masonry. There is a chamber within, which is not always accessible, on account of the water. Some pieces of columns were found in digging at the base of the pyramid, two of which were put together and fixed at the angles of the building. I have no idea how they were originally applied, as there does not seem sufficient authority to supply a court and a surrounding portico. These meadows and the mount offer some amusement to the botanist in the spring; the mount especially is almost covered with orchideæ, amongst which *Ophrys apifera* and *tenthredinifera*, and *Orchis papilionacea*, are the most abundant. I found here also *Ophrys hiulca* and *arachnitis* of the Flora Romana.

Our next object is the brick arch of San Lazzaro, through which the road passes, though it is filled up nearly to its springing. There are several substructions at the foot of the hill, which appear to have belonged to the same edifice, but what that was, nobody knows.

Hence we walk to the beginning of the Strada Marmorata, the ancient Littus Marmorea, so called, as they say, because the marbles brought from various countries were usually landed here; a very disappointing reason for so fine a name. On the right is a pathway up the hill, and some fragments of antiquity are discernible, particularly a considerable portion of an ancient cornice, built up in a wall. If we continue this upper track, we pass by the churches of Sant Alessio and Santa Sabina, and descend on the Circus Maximus. The other keeps along the shore of the Tiber, and we may notice other substructions on the hill; and in the river, if the water be low, some traces of the Pons Sublicius.

Returning towards the Corso, we may pass by a female colossal bust, which might almost do for a companion to Dr. Clarke's Ceres, in the vestibule of the public library at Cambridge. It is supposed to be an Isis, but the Romans call it Madama Lucrezia. It stands in a little street which derives its name from the figure, and which opens into the Piazza di San Marco. I have not mentioned the church which gives name to this piazza,