Oliphant Margaret

The Makers of Modern Rome, in Four Books

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Содержание

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PREFACE

Nobody will expect in this book, or from me, the results of original research, or a settlement – if any settlement is ever possible – of vexed questions which have occupied the gravest students. An individual glance at the aspect of these questions which most clearly presents itself to a mind a little exercised in the aspects of humanity, but not trained in the ways of learning, is all I attempt or desire. This humble endeavour has been conscientious at least. The work has been much interrupted by sorrow and suffering, on which account, for any slips of hers, the writer asks the indulgence of her unknown friends.

BOOK I.
HONOURABLE WOMEN NOT A FEW

CHAPTER I.
ROME IN THE FOURTH CENTURY

There is no place in the world of which it is less necessary to attempt description (or of which so many descriptions have been attempted) than the once capital of that world, the supreme and eternal city, the seat of empire, the home of the conqueror, the greatest human centre of power and influence which our race has ever known. Its history is unique and its position. Twice over in circumstances and by means as different as can be imagined it has conquered and held subject the world. All that was known to man in their age gave tribute and acknowledgment to the Cæsars; and an ever-widening circle, taking in countries and races unknown to the Cæsars, have looked to the spiritual sovereigns who succeeded them as to the first and highest of authorities on earth. The reader knows, or at least is assisted on all hands to have some idea and conception of the classical city – to be citizens of which was the aim of the whole world's ambition, and whose

institutions and laws, and even its architecture and domestic customs, were the only rule of civilisation – with its noble and grandiose edifices, its splendid streets, the magnificence and largeness of its life; while on the other hand most people are able to form some idea of what was the Rome of the Popes, the superb yet squalid mediæval city with its great palaces and its dens of poverty, and that conjunction of exuberance and want which does not strike the eye while the bulk of a population remains in a state of slavery. But there is a period between, which has not attracted much attention from English writers, and which the reader passes by as a time in which there is little desirable to dwell upon, though it is in reality the moment of transition when the old is about to be replaced by the new, and when already the energy and enthusiasm of a new influence is making its appearance among the tragic dregs and abysses of the past. An ancient civilisation dying in the impotence of luxury and wealth from which all active power or influence over the world had departed, and a new and profound internal revolt, breaking up its false calm from within, before the raging forces of another rising power had yet begun to thunder at its gates without – form however a spectacle full of interest, especially when the scene of so many conflicts is traversed and lighted up by the most lifelike figures, and has left its record, both of good and evil, in authentic and detailed chronicles, full of individual character and life, in which the men and women of the age stand before us, occupied and surrounded by circumstances which are very different from our own, yet

linked to us by that unfailing unity of human life and feeling which makes the farthest off foreigner a brother, and the most distant of our primeval predecessors like a neighbour of to-day.

The circumstances of Rome in the middle and end of the fourth century were singular in every point of view. With all its prestige and all its memories, it was a city from which power and the dominant forces of life had faded. The body was there, the great town with its high places made to give law and judgment to the world, even the officials and executors of the codes which had dispensed justice throughout the universe; but the spirit of dominion and empire had passed away. A great aristocracy, accustomed to the first place everywhere, full of wealth, full of leisure, remained; but with nothing to do to justify this greatness, nothing but luxury, the prize and accompaniment of it, now turned into its sole object and meaning. The patrician class had grown by use, by the high capability to fill every post and lead every expedition which they had constantly shown, which was their original cause and the reason of their existence, into a position of unusual superiority and splendour. But that reason had died away, the empire had departed from them, the world had a new centre: and the sons of the men who had conducted all the immense enterprises of Rome were left behind with the burden of their great names, and the weight of their great wealth, and nothing to do but to enjoy and amuse themselves: no vocations to fulfil, no important public functions to occupy their time and their powers. Such a position is perhaps the

most dreadful that can come to any class in the history of a nation. Great and irresponsible wealth, the supremacy of high place, without those bonds of practical affairs which, in the case of all rulers – even of estates or of factories – preserve the equilibrium of humanity, are instruments of degradation rather than of elevation. To have something to do for it, something to do with it, is the condition which alone makes boundless wealth wholesome. And this had altogether failed in the imperial city. Pleasure and display had taken the place of work and duty. Rome had no longer any imperial affairs in hand. Her day was over: the absence of a court and all its intrigues might have been little loss to any community – but that those threads of universal dominion which had hitherto occupied them had been transferred to other hands, and that all the struggles, the great questions, the causes, the pleas, the ordinances of the world were now decided and given forth at Constantinople, was ruin to the once masters of the world. It was worse than destruction, a more dreadful overthrow than anything that the Goths and barbarians could bring – not death which brings a satisfaction of all necessities in making an end of them – but that death in life which fills men's blood with cold.

The pictures left us of this condition of affairs do indeed chill the blood. It is natural that there should be a certain amount of exaggeration in them. We read daily in our own contemporary annals, records of society of which we are perfectly competent to judge, that though true to fact in many points, they give

a picture too dark in all its shadows, too garish in its lights, to afford a just view of the state of any existing condition of things. Contemporaries know how much to receive and how much to reject, and are apt to smile at the possibility of any permanent impression upon the face of history being made by lights and darks beyond the habit of nature. But yet when every allowance has been made, the contemporary pictures of Rome at this unhappy period leave an impression on the mind which is not contradicted but supported and enforced by the incidents of the time and the course of history. The populace, which had for ages been fed and nourished upon the bread of public doles and those entertainments of ferocious gaiety which deadened every higher sense, had sunk into complete debasement. Honest work and honest purpose, or any hope of improving their own position, elevating themselves or training their children, do not seem to have existed among them. A half-ludicrous detail, which reminds us that the true Roman had always a trifle of pedantry in his pride, is noted with disgust and disdain even by serious writers – which is that the common people bore no longer their proper names, but were known among each other by nicknames, such as those of Cabbage-eaters, Sausage-mongers, and other coarse familiar vulgarisms. This might be pardoned to the crowd which spent its idle days at the circus or spectacle, and its nights on the benches in the Colosseum or in the porch of a palace; but it is difficult to exaggerate the debasement of a populace which lived for amusement alone, picking up the miserable morsels which

kept it alive from any chance or tainted source, without work to do or hope of amelioration. They formed the shouting, hoarse accompaniment of every pageant, they swarmed on the lower seats of every amphitheatre, howling much criticism as well as boisterous applause, and keeping in fear, and disgusted yet forced compliance with their coarse exactions, the players and showmen who supplied their lives with an object. According to all the representations that have reached us, nothing more degraded than this populace – encumbering every portico and marble stair, swarming over the benches of the Colosseum, basking in filth and idleness in the brilliant sun of Rome, or seeking, among the empty glories of a triumphal age gone by, a lazy shelter from it – has ever been known.

The higher classes suffered in their way as profoundly, and with a deeper consciousness, from the same debasing influences of stagnation. The descriptions of their useless life of luxury are almost too extravagant to quote. "A loose silken robe," says the critic and historian of the time, Ammianus Marcellinus, speaking of a Roman noble, – "for a toga of the lightest tissue would have been too heavy for him – linen so transparent that the air blew through it, fans and parasols to protect him from the light, a troop of eunuchs always round him." This was the appearance and costume of a son of the great and famous senators of Rome. "When he was not at the bath, or at the circus to maintain the cause of some charioteer, or to inspect some new horses, he lay half asleep upon a luxurious couch in great rooms paved

with marble, panelled with mosaic." The luxurious heat implied, which makes the freshness of the marble, the thinness of the linen, so desirable, as in a picture of Mr. Alma Tadema's, bids us at the same time pause in receiving the whole of this description as unquestionable; for Rome has its seasons in which vast chambers paved with marble are no longer agreeable, though the manners and utterances of the race still tend to a complete ignoring of this other side of the picture: but yet no doubt its general features are true.

When this Sybarite went out it was upon a lofty chariot, where he reclined negligently, showing off himself, his curled and perfumed locks, his robes, with their wonderful embroideries and tissues of silk and gold, to the admiration of the world; his horses' harness were covered with ornaments of gold, his coachman armed with a golden wand instead of a whip, and the whole equipage followed by a procession of attendants, slaves, freedmen, eunuchs, down to the knaves of the kitchen, the hewers of wood and drawers of water, to give importance to the retinue, which pushed along through the streets with all the brutality which is the reverse side of senseless display, pushing citizens and passers-by out of the way. The dinner parties of the evening were equally childish in their extravagance: the tables covered with strange dishes, monsters of the sea and of the mountains, fishes and birds of unknown kinds and unequalled size. The latter seems to have been a special subject of pride, for we are told of the servants bringing scales to weigh them, and

notaries crowding round with their tablets and styles to record the weight. After the feast came a "hydraulic organ," and other instruments of corresponding magnitude, to fill the great hall with resounding music, and pantomimical plays and dances to enliven the dulness of the luxurious spectators on their couches – "women with long hair, who might have married and given subjects to the state," were thus employed, to the indignation of the critic.

This chronicler of folly and bad manners would not be human if he omitted the noble woman of Rome from his picture. Her rooms full of obsequious attendants, slaves, and eunuchs, half of her time was occupied by the monstrous toilette which annulled all natural charms to give to the Society beauty a fictitious and artificial display of red and white, of painted eyelids, tortured hair, and extravagant dress. An authority still more trenchant than the heathen historian, Jerome, describes even one of the noble ladies who headed the Christian society of Rome as spending most of the day before the mirror. Like the ladies of Venice in a later age, these women, laden with ornaments, attired in cloth of gold, and with shoes that crackled under their feet with the stiffness of metallic decorations, were almost incapacitated from walking, even with the support of their attendants; and a life so accoutred was naturally spent in the display of the charms and wealth thus painfully set forth.

The fairer side of the picture, the revolt of the higher nature from such a life, brings us into the very heart of this society:

and nothing can be more curious than the gradual penetration of a different and indeed sharply contrary sentiment, the impulse of asceticism and the rudest personal self-deprivation, amid a community spoilt by such a training, yet not incapable of disgust and impatience with the very luxury which had seemed essential to its being. The picturesqueness and attraction of the picture lies here, as in so many cases, chiefly on the women's side.

It is necessary to note, however, the curious mixture which existed in this Roman society, where Christianity as a system was already strong, and the high officials of the Church were beginning to take gradually and by slow degrees the places abandoned by the functionaries of the empire. Though the hierarchy was already established, and the Bishop of Rome had assumed a special importance in the Church, Paganism still held in the high places that sway of the old economy giving place to the new, which is at once so desperate and so nerveless – impotence and bitterness mingling with the false tolerance of cynicism. The worship of the gods had dropped into a survival of certain habits of mind and life, to which some clung with the angry revulsion of terror against a new revolutionary power at first despised: and some held with the loose grasp of an imaginative and poetical system, and some with a sense of the intellectual superiority of art and philosophy over the arguments and motives that moved the crowd. Life had ebbed away from these religions of the past. The fictitious attempt of Julian to re-establish the worship of the gods, and bring new blood into the exhausted veins of the

mythological system, had in reality given the last proof of its extinction as a power in the world: but still it remained lingering out its last, holding a place, sometimes dignified by a gleam of noble manners and the graces of intellectual life – and often, it must be allowed, justified by the failure of the Church to embody that purity and elevation which its doctrines, but scarcely its morals or life, professed. Thus the faith in Christ, often real, but very faulty – and the faith in Apollo, almost always fictitious, but sometimes dignified and superior – existed side by side. The father might hold the latter with a superb indifference to its rites, and a contemptuous tolerance for its opponents, while the mother held the first with occasional hot impulses of devotion, and performances of penance for the pardon of those worldly amusements and dissipations to which she returned with all the more zest when her vigils and prayers were over.

This conjunction of two systems so opposite in every impulse, proceeding from foundations so absolutely contrary to each other, could not fail to have an extraordinary effect upon the minds of the generations moved by it, and affords, I think, an explanation of some events very difficult to explain on ordinary principles, and particularly the abandonment of what would appear the most unquestionable duties, by some of the personages, especially the women whose histories and manners fill this chapter of the great records of Rome. Some of them deserted their children to bury themselves in the deserts, to withdraw to the mountains, placing leagues of land and sea

between themselves and their dearest duties – why? the reader asks. At the bidding of a priest, at the selfish impulse of that desire to save their own souls, which in our own day at least has come to mean a degrading motive – is the general answer. It would not be difficult, however, to paint on the other side a picture of the struggle with the authorities of her family for the training of a son, for the marriage of a daughter, from which a woman might shrink with a sense of impotence, knowing the prestige of the noble guardian against whom she would have to contend, and all the forces of family pride, of tradition and use and wont, that would be arrayed against her. Better perhaps, the mother might think, to abandon that warfare, to leave the conflict for which she was not strong enough, than to lose the love of her child as well, and become to him the emblem of an opposing faction attempting to turn him from those delights of youth which the hereditary authority of his house encouraged instead of opposing. It is difficult perhaps for the historians to take such motives into consideration, but I think the student of human nature may feel them to be worth a thought, and receive them as some justification, or at least apology, for the actions of some of the Roman women who fill the story of the time.

Unfortunately it is not possible to leave out the Church in Rome when we collect the details of depravity and folly in Society. One cannot but feel how robust is the faith which goes back to these ages for guidance and example when one sees the image in St. Jerome's pages of a period so early in the

history of Christianity. "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" our Lord said to the chosen disciples, His nearest friends and followers, in the moment of His own exceeding anguish, with a reproach so sorrowful, yet so conscious of the weakness of humanity, that it silences every excuse. We may say, for a poor four hundred years could not the Church keep the impress of His teaching, the reality of the faith of those who had themselves fallen and fainted, yet found grace to live and die for their Master? But four centuries are a long time, and men are but men even with the inheritance of Christians. They belonged to their race, their age, and the manifold influences which modify in the crowd everything it believes or wishes. And they were exposed to many temptations which were doubly strong in that world to which by birth and training they belonged. How is an ordinary man to despise wealth in the midst of a society corrupted by it, and in which it is supreme? how learn to be indifferent to rank and prestige in a city where without these every other claim was trampled under foot? "The virtues of the primitive Church," says Villemain of a still later period, "had been under the guard of poverty and persecution: they were weak in success and triumph. Enthusiasm became less pure, the rules of life less severe. In the always increasing crowd of proselytes were many unworthy persons, who turned to Christianity for reasons of ambition and self-interest, to make way at Court, to appear faithful to the emperor. The Church, enriched at once by the spoil of the temples and the offerings of the Christian

crowd, began to clothe itself in profane magnificence." Those who attained the higher clerical honours were sure, according to the evidence of Ammianus, "of being enriched by the offerings of the Roman ladies, and drove forth like noblemen in lofty chariots, clothed magnificently, and sat down at tables worthy of kings." The Church, endowed in an earlier period by converts, who offered sometimes all their living for the sustenance of the community which gave them home and refuge, had continued to receive the gifts of the pious after the rules of ordinary life regained their force; and now when she had yielded to a great extent to the prevailing temptations of the age, found a large means of endowment in the gifts of deathbed repentance and the weakness of dying penitents, of which she was reputed to take large advantage: wealth grew within her borders, and luxury with it, according to the example of surrounding society. It is Jerome himself who reports the saying of one of the highest of Roman officials to Bishop Damasus. "If you will undertake to make me Bishop of Rome, I will be a Christian to-morrow." Not even the highest place in the Government was so valuable and so great. It is Jerome also who traces for us – the fierce indignation of his natural temper, mingling with an involuntary perception of the ludicrous side of the picture – a popular young priest of his time, whose greatest solicitude was to have perfumed robes, a well fitting shoe, hair beautifully curled, and fingers glittering with jewels, and who walked on tip-toe lest he should soil his feet.

"What are these men? To those who see them pass they

are more like bridegrooms than priests. Some among them devote their life and energies to the single object of knowing the names, the houses, the habits, the disposition of all the ladies in Rome. I will sketch for you, dear Eustochium, in a few lines, the day's work of one of them, great in the arts of which I speak, that by means of the master you may the more easily recognise his disciples.

"Our hero rises with the sun: he regulates the order of his visits, studies the shortest ways, and arrives before he is wanted, almost before his friends are awake. If he perceives anything that strikes his fancy, a pretty piece of furniture or an elegant marble, he gazes at it, praises it, turns it over in his hands, and grieves that he has not one like it – thus extorting rather than obtaining the object of his desires; for what woman would not hesitate to offend the universal gossip of the town? Temperance, modesty (*castitas*), and fasting are his sworn enemies. He smells out a feast and loves savoury meats.

"Wherever one goes one is sure to meet him; he is always there before you. He knows all the news, proclaims it in an authoritative tone, and is better informed than any one else can be. The horses which carry him to the four quarters of Rome in pursuit of this honest task are the finest you can see anywhere; you would say he was the brother of that King of Thrace known in story by the speed of his coursers.

"This man," adds the implacable satirist in another letter, "was born in the deepest poverty, brought up under the thatch of a peasant's cottage, with scarcely enough of black bread and millet to satisfy the cravings of his appetite; yet

now he is fastidious and hard to please, disdaining honey and the finest flour. An expert in the science of the table, he knows every kind of fish by name, and whence come the best oysters, and what district produces the birds of finest savour. He cares only for what is rare and unwholesome. In another kind of vice he is not less remarkable; his mania is to lie in wait for old men and women without children. He besieges their beds when they are ill, serves them in the most disgusting offices, more humble and servile than any nurse. When the doctor enters he trembles, asking with a faltering voice how the patient is, if there is any hope of saving him. If there is any hope, if the disease is cured, the priest disappears with regrets for his loss of time, cursing the wretched old man who insists on living to be as old as Methusalem."

The last accusation, which has been the reproach of the Church in many different ages, had just been specially condemned by a law of the Emperor Valentinian I., declaring null and void all legacies made to priests, a law which called forth Jerome's furious denunciation, not of itself, but of the abuse which called it forth. This was a graver matter than the onslaught upon the curled darlings of the priesthood, more like bridegrooms than priests, who carried the news from boudoir to boudoir, and laid their entertainers under contribution for the bibelots and ancient bric-a-brac which their hearts desired. Thus wherever the eye turned there was nothing but luxury and the love of luxury, foolish display, extravagance and emulation in

all the arts of prodigality, a life without gravity, without serious occupation, with nothing in it to justify the existence of those human creatures standing between earth and heaven, and capable of so many better things. The revulsion, a revulsion inspired by disgust and not without extravagance in its new way, was sure to come.

CHAPTER II.
THE PALACE ON THE AVENTINE

The strong recoil of human nature from those fatal elements which time after time have threatened the destruction of all society is one of the noblest things in history, as it is one of the most divine in life. There are evidences that it exists even in the most wicked individuals, and it very evidently comes uppermost in every commonwealth from century to century to save again and again from utter debasement a community or a nation. When depravity becomes the rule instead of the exception, and sober principle appears on the point of yielding altogether to the whirl of folly or the thirst of self-indulgence, then it may always be expected that some ember of divine indignation, some thrill of high disgust with the miserable satisfactions of the world will kindle in one quarter or another and set light to a thousand smouldering tires over all the face of the earth. It is one of the highest evidences of that charter of our being which is our most precious possession, the reflection of that image of God which amid all degradations still holds its place in human nature, and will not be destroyed. We may mourn indeed that so short a span of centuries had so effaced the recollection of the brightest light that ever shone among men, as to make the extravagance of a human revulsion and revolution necessary in order to preserve and restore the better life of Christendom. At the same time it is

our salvation as a race that such revolutions, however imperfect they may be in themselves, are sure to come.

This revulsion from vice, degradation, and evil of every kind, public and personal, had already come with the utmost excess of self-punishment and austerity in the East, where already the deserts were mined with caverns and holes in the sand, to which hermits and cœ;nobites, the one class scarcely less exalted in religious passion and suffering than the other, had escaped from the current of evil which they did not feel themselves capable of facing, and lived and starved and agonised for the salvation of their own souls and for a world lying in wickedness. The fame of the Thebaid and its saints and martyrs, slowly making itself known through the great distances and silences, had already breathed over the world, when Athanasius, driven by persecution from his see and his country, came to Rome, accompanied by two of the monks whose character was scarcely understood as yet in the West, and bringing with him his own book, the life of St. Antony of the desert, a work which had as great an effect in that time as the most popular of publications, spread over the world in thousands of copies, could have now. It puzzles the modern reader to think how a book should thus have moved the world and revolutionised hundreds of lives, while it existed only in manuscript and every example had to be carefully and tediously copied before it could touch even those who were wealthy enough to secure themselves such a luxury. What readings in common, what earnest circles of auditors, what rapt intense hanging upon

the lips of the reader, there must have been before any work, even the most sacred, penetrated to the crowd! – but to us no doubt the process seems more slow and difficult than it really was when scribes were to be found everywhere, and manuscripts were treated with reverence and respect. When Athanasius found refuge in Rome, which was during the pontificate, or rather – for the full papal authority had as yet been claimed by no one – the primacy – of Liberius, and about the year 341, he was received by all that was best in Rome with great hospitality and sympathy. Rome so far as it was Christian was entirely orthodox, the Arian heresy having gained no part of the Christian society there – and a man of genius and imposing character, who brought into that stagnant atmosphere the breath of a larger world, who had shared the councils of the emperor and lived in the cells of Egypt – an orator, a traveller, an exile, with every kind of interest attaching to him, was such a visitor as seldom appeared in the city deserted by empire. Something like the man who nine centuries later went about the Italian streets with the signs upon him of one who had been through heaven and hell, the Eastern bishop must have appeared to the languid citizens, with the brown of the desert still on his cheeks, yet something of the air of a courtly prelate, a friend of princes; while his attendants, one with all the wildness of a hermit from the desert in his eyes and aspect, in the unfamiliar robe and cowl – and the other mild and young like the ideal youth, shy and simple as a girl – were wonderful apparitions in the fatigued and *blasé* society, which longed above everything

for something new, something real, among all the mocks and shows of their impotent life.

One of the houses in which Athanasius and his monks were most welcome was the palace of a noble widow, Albina, who lived the large and luxurious life of her class in the perfect freedom of a Roman matron, Christian, yet with no idea in her mind of retirement from the world, or renunciation of its pleasures. A woman of a more or less instructive mind and lively intelligence, she received with the greatest interest and pleasure these strangers who had so much to tell, the great bishop flying from his enemies, the monks from the desert. That she and her circle gathered round him with that rapt and flattering attention which not the most abstracted saint any more than the sternest general can resist, is evident from the story, and it throws a gleam of softer light upon the impassioned theologian who stood fast, "I, Athanasius, against the world" for that mysterious splendour of the Trinity, against which the heretical East had risen. In the Roman lady's withdrawingroom, in his dark and flowing Eastern robes, we find him amid the eager questionings of the women, describing to them the strange life of the desert which it was such a wonder to hear of – the evensong that rose as from every crevice of the earth, while the Egyptian after-glow burned in one great circle of colour round the vast globe of sky, diffusing an illumination weird and mystic over the fantastic rocks and dark openings where the singers lived unseen. What a picture to be set before that soft, eager circle, half rising from silken couches,

clothed with tissues of gold, blazing with jewels, their delicate cheeks glowing in artificial red and white, their crisped and curled tresses surmounted by the fantastic towering headdress which weighed them down!

Among the ladies was the child of the house, the little girl who was her mother's excuse for retaining the freedom of her widowhood, Marcella: a thoughtful and pensive child, devouring all these wonderful tales, listening to everything and laying up a store of silent resolutions and fancies in her heart. Her elder sister Asella would seem to have already secluded herself in precocious devotion from the family, or at least is not referred to. The story which touched the general mind of the time with so strange and strong an enthusiasm, fell into the virgin soil of this young spirit like the seed of a new life. But the little Roman maiden was no ascetic. She had evidently no impulse, as some young devotees have had, to set out barefoot in search of suffering. When Athanasius left Rome, he left in the house which had received him so kindly his life of St. Antony, the first copy which had been seen in the Western world. This manuscript, written perhaps by the hand of one of those wonderful monks, the strangest figures in her luxurious world whom Marcella knew, became the treasure of her youth. Such a present, at such a time, was enough to occupy the visionary silence of a girl's life, often so full of dreams unknown and unsearchable even to her nearest surroundings. She went through however the usual routine of a young lady's life in Rome. Madame Albina the mother, though

full of interest and curiosity in respect to all things intellectual and Christian, held still more dearly a mother's natural desire to see her only remaining child nobly married and established in the splendour and eminence to which she was born. We are told that Marcella grew up to be one of the beauties of Rome, but as this is an inalienable qualification of all these beautiful souls, it is not necessary to believe that the "insignem decorem corporis" meant any extraordinary distinction. She carried out at all events her natural fate and married a rich and noble husband, of whom however we know no details, except that he died some months after, leaving her without child or tie to the ordinary life of the world, in all the freedom of widowhood, at a very early age.

Thus placed in full command of her fate, she never seems to have hesitated as to what she should do with herself. She was, as a matter of course, assailed by many new suitors, among whom her historian, who is no other than St. Jerome himself, makes special mention of the exceptionally wealthy Cerealis ("whose name is great among the consuls"), and who was so splendid a suitor that the fact that he was old scarcely seems to have told against him. Marcella's refusal of this great match and of all the others offered to her, offended and alienated her friends and even her mother, and there followed a moment of pain and perplexity in her life. She is said to have made a sacrifice of a part of her possessions to relatives to whom, failing herself, it fell to keep up the continuance of the family name, hoping thus to secure their tolerance. And she acquired the reputation of an eccentric,

and probably of a *poseuse*, so general in all times when a young woman forsakes the beaten way, as she had done by giving up the ridiculous fashions and toilettes of the time, putting aside the rouge and antimony, the disabling splendour of cloth of gold, and assuming a simple dress of a dark colour, a thing which shocked her generation profoundly. The gossip rose and flew from mouth to mouth among the marble salons where the Roman ladies languished for a new subject, or in the ante-rooms, where young priests and deacons awaited or forestalled the awakening of their patronesses. It might be the Hôtel Rambouillet of which we are reading, and a fine lady taking refuge at Port Royal who was being discussed and torn to pieces in those antique palaces. What was the meaning that lay beneath that brown gown? Was it some unavowed disappointment, or, more exciting still, some secret intrigue, some low-placed love which she dared not acknowledge? Withdrawn into a villa had she, into the solitude of a suburban garden, hid from every eye? and who then was the companion of Marcella's solitude? The ladies who discussed her had small faith in austerities, nor in the desire of a young and attractive woman to live altogether alone.

It is very likely that Marcella herself, as well as her critics, soon began to feel that the mock desert into which she had made the gardens of her villa was indeed a fictitious way of living the holy life, and the calumny was more ready and likely to take hold of this artificial retirement, than of a course of existence led within sight of the world. She finally took a wiser

and more reasonable way. Her natural home was a palace upon the Aventine to which she returned, consecrating a portion of it to pious uses, a chapel for common worship and much accommodation for the friends of similar views and purposes who immediately began to gather about her. It is evident that there were already many of these women in the best society of Rome. A lively sentiment of feminine society, of the multiplied and endless talks, consultations, speculations, of a community of women, open to every pleasant curiosity and quick to every new interest, rises immediately before us in that first settlement of monasticism – or, as the ecclesiastical historians call it, the first convent of Rome, before our eyes. It was not a convent after all so much as a large and hospitable feminine house, possessing the great luxury of beautiful rooms and furniture, and the liberal ways of a large and wealthy family, with everything that was most elegant, most cultured, most elevated, as well as most devout and pious. The "Souls," to use our own jargon of the moment, would seem indeed to have been more truly represented there than the Sisters of our modern understanding, though we may acknowledge that there are few communities of Sisters in which this element does not more or less flourish. Christian ladies who were touched like herself with the desire of a truer and purer life, gathered about her, as did the French ladies about Port Royal, and women of the same class everywhere, wherever a woman of influential character leads the way.

The character and position of these ladies was not perhaps so

much different as we might suppose from those of the court of Louis XIV. or any other historical period in which great luxuries and much dissipation had sickened the heart of all that was good and noble. Yet there were very special characteristics in their lot. Some of them were the wives of pagan officials of the empire, holding a sometimes devious and always agitated course through the troubles of a divided household: and there were many young widows perplexed with projects of remarriage, of whom some would be tempted by the prospects of a triumphant re-entry into the full enjoyments of life, although a larger number were probably resistant and alarmed, anxious to retain their freedom, or to devote themselves as Marcella had done to a higher life. Women of fashion not unwilling to add a devotion *à la mode* to their other distractions, women of intellectual aspirations, lovers of the higher education, seekers after a society altogether brilliant and new, without any special emotions of religious feeling, no doubt filled up the ranks. "A society," says Thierry, in his *Life of Jerome*, "of rich and influential women, belonging for the great part to patrician families, thus organised itself, and the oratory on the Aventine became a seat of lay influence and power which the clergy themselves were soon compelled to reckon with."

The heads of the community bore the noblest names in Rome, which however at that period of universal deterioration was not always a guarantee of noble birth, since the greatest names were sometimes assumed with the slenderest of claims to their honours. Marcella's sister, Asella, older than the rest, and a sort

of mother among them, had for a long time before "lived the life" in obscurity and humbleness, and several others not remarkable in the record, were prominent associates. The actual members of the community, however, are not so much remarked or dwelt upon as the visitors who came and went, not all of them of consistent religious character, ladies of the great world. One of these, Fabiola, affords an amusing episode in the graver tale, the contrast of a butterfly of society, a *grande dame* of fascinating manners, airs, and graces, unfortunate in her husbands, of whom she had two, one of them divorced – and not quite unwilling to divorce the second and try her luck again. Another, one of the most important of all in family and pretensions, and by far the most important in history of these constant visitors, was Paula, a descendant (collateral, the link being of the lightest and easiest kind, as was characteristic of the time) of the great Æmilius Paulus, the daughter of a distinguished Greek who claimed to be descended from Agamemnon, and widow of another who claimed Æneas as his ancestor. These large claims apart, she was certainly a great lady in every sense of the word, delicate, luxurious, following all the fashions of the time. She too was a widow, with a family of young daughters, in that enviable state of freedom which the Roman ladies give every sign of having used and enjoyed to the utmost, the only condition in which they were quite at liberty to regulate their own fate. Paula is the most interesting of the community, as she is the one of whom we know the most. No fine lady more exquisite, more

fastidious, more splendid than she. Not even her Christianity had beguiled her from the superlative finery of her Roman habits. She was one of the fine ladies who could not walk abroad without the support of her servants, nor scarcely cross the marble floor from one silken couch to another without tottering, as well she might, under the weight of the heavy tissues interwoven with gold, of which her robes were made. A widow at thirty-five, she was still in full possession of the charms of womanhood, and the sunshine of life (though we are told that her grief for her husband was profound and sincere) – with her young daughters growing up round her, more like her sisters than her children, and sharing every thought. Blæsilla, the eldest, a widow at twenty, was, like her mother, a Roman exquisite, loving everything that was beautiful and soft and luxurious. In the affectionate gibes of the family she is described as spending entire days before her mirror, giving herself up to all the extravagances of dress and personal decoration, the tower of curls upon her head, the touch of rouge on her cheeks. A second daughter, Paulina, was on the eve of marriage with a young patrician, as noble, as rich, and, as was afterwards proved, as devoutly Christian as the family into which he married. The third member of the family, Eustochium, a girl of sixteen, of a character contrasting strongly with those of her beautiful mother and sister, a saint from her birth, was the favourite, and almost the child, of Marcella, instructed by her from her earliest years, and had already fixed her choice upon a monastic life, and would seem to have been a resident

in the Aventine palace to which the others were such frequent visitors. Of all this delightful and brilliant party she is the one born recluse, severe in youthful virtue, untouched by any of the fascinations of the world. The following very pretty and graphic story is told of her, in which we have a curious glimpse into the strangely mixed society of the time.

The family of Paula though Christian, and full of religious fervour, or at least imbued with the new spirit of revolt against the corruption of the time, was closely connected with the still existing pagan society of Rome. Her sister-in-law, sister of her husband and aunt of her children, was a certain lady named Prætextata, the wife of Hymettius, a high official under the Emperor Julian the Apostate, both of them belonging, with something of the fictitious enthusiasm of their master, to the faith of the old gods. No doubt one of the severest critics of that society on the Aventine, Prætextata saw with impatience and wrath, what no doubt she considered the artificial gravity, inspired by her surroundings, of the young niece who had already announced her intention never to marry, and to withdraw altogether from the world. Such resolutions on the part of girls who know nothing of the world they abandon have exasperated the most devout of parents, and it was not wonderful if this pagan lady thought it preposterous. The little plot which she formed against the serious girl was, however, of the most good-natured and innocent kind. Finding that words had no effect upon her, the elder lady invited Eustochium to her house on a visit. The

young vestal came all unsuspicious in her little brown gown, the costume of humility, but had scarcely entered her aunt's house when she was seized by the caressing and flattering hands of the attendants, interested in the plot as the favourite maids of such an establishment would be, who unloosed her long hair and twisted it into curls and plaits, took away her humble dress, clothed her in silk and cloth of gold, covered her with ornaments and led her before the mirror which reflected all these charms, to dazzle her eyes with the apparition of herself, so different from the schoolroom figure with which she was acquainted. The little plot was clever as well as innocent, and might, no doubt, have made a heart of sixteen beat high. But Eustochium with her Greek name, and her virgin heart, was the grave girl we all know, the one here and there among the garden of girls, born to a natural seriousness which is beyond such temptations. She let them turn her round and round, received sweetly in her gentle calm the applauses of the collected household, looked at her image in the mirror as at a picture – and went home again in her little brown gown with her story to tell, which, no doubt, was an endless amusement and triumph to the ladies on the Aventine, repeated to every new-comer with many a laugh at the foolishness of the clever aunt who had hoped by such means to seduce Eustochium – Eustochium, the most serious of them all!

Such was the first religious community in Rome. It was the natural home of Marcella to which her friends gathered, without in most cases deserting their own palaces, or forsaking their own

place in the world – a centre and home of the heart, where they met constantly, the residents ever ready to receive, not only their closer associates, but all the society of Roman ladies, who might be attracted by the higher aspirations of intellect and piety. Not a stone exists of that noble mansion now, but it is supposed to have stood close to the existing church of Sta. Sabina, an unrivalled mount of vision. From that mount now covered with so many ruins the ladies looked out upon the yet unbroken splendour of the city, Tiber far below sweeping round under the walls. Palatinus, with the "white roofs" of that home to which Horatius looked before he plunged into the yellow river, still stood intact at their right hand: and, older far, and longer surviving, the wealth of nature, the glory of the Roman sky and air, the white-blossomed daphne and the starry myrtle, and those roses which are as ancient inhabitants of the world as any we know flinging their glories about the marble balustrades and making the terraces sweet. There would they walk and talk, the recluses at ease and simple in their brown gowns, the great ladies uneasy under the weight of their toilettes, but all eager to hear, to tell, to read the last letter from the East, from the desert or the cloister, to exchange their experiences and plan their charities. There is nothing ascetic in the picture, which is a very different one from that of those austere solitudes of the desert, which had suggested and inspired it – the lady Paula tottering in, with a servant on either side to conduct her to the nearest couch, and young Blæsilla making a brilliant irruption in all her bravery,

with her jewels sparkling and her transparent veil floating, and her golden heels tapping upon the marble floor. This is not how we understand the atmosphere of a convent; yet, if fact were taken into due consideration, the greatest convents have been very like it, in all ages – the finest ladies having always loved that intercourse and contrast, half envious of the peace of their cloistered sisters, half pleased to dazzle them with a splendour which never could be theirs.

> "No fixed rule," says Thierry, in his *Life of St. Jerome*, "existed in this assembly, where there was so much individuality, and where monastic life was not even attempted. They read the Holy Scriptures together, sang psalms, organised good works, discussed the condition of the Church, the progress of spiritual life in Italy and in the provinces, and kept up a correspondence with the brothers and sisters outside of a more strictly monastic character. Those of the associates who carried on the ordinary life of the world came from time to time to refresh their spirits in these holy meetings, then returned to their families. Those who were free gave themselves up to devotional exercises, according to their taste and inclination, and Marcella retired into her desert. In a short time these exercises were varied by the pursuit of knowledge. All Roman ladies of rank knew a little Greek, if only to be able to say to their favourites, according to the *mot* of Juvenal, repeated by a father of the Church, Ζωὴ καὶ ψυχὴ, my life and my soul: the Christian ladies studied it better and with a higher motive. Several later versions of the Old and New Testament were in

> general circulation in Italy, differing considerably from each other, and this very difference interested anxious minds in referring to the original Greek for the Gospels, and for the Hebrew books to the Greek of the Septuagint, the favourite guide of Western translators. The Christian ladies accordingly set themselves to perfect their knowledge of Greek, and many, among whom were Marcella and Paula, added the Hebrew language, in order that they might sing the psalms in the very words of the prophet-king. Marcella even became, by intelligent comparison of the texts, so strong in exegetical knowledge that she was often consulted by the priests themselves."

It was about the year 380 that this establishment was formed. "The desert of Marcella" above referred to was, as the reader will remember, a great garden in a suburb of Rome, which she had pleased herself by allowing to run wild, and where occasionally this great Roman lady played at a hermit's life in solitude and abstinence. Paula's desert, perhaps not so easy a one, was in her own house, where, besides the three daughters already mentioned, she had a younger girl Rufina, not yet of an age to show any marked tendencies, and a small boy Toxotius, her only son, who was jealously looked after by his pagan relatives, to keep him from being swept away by this tide of Christianity.

Such was the condition of the circle on the Aventine, when a great event happened in Rome. Following many struggles and disasters in the East, chiefly the continually recurring misfortune of a breach of unity, a diocese here and there exhibiting its

freedom by choosing two bishops representing different parties at the same time, and thus calling for the exercise of some central authority – Pope Damasus had called a council in Rome. He was so well qualified to be a judge in such cases that he had himself won his see at the point of the sword, after a stoutly contested fight in which much blood was shed, and the church of S. Lorenzo, the scene of the struggle, was besieged and taken like a castle. If he had hoped by this means to establish the universal authority of his see, a pretension as yet undeveloped, it was immediately forestalled by the Bishop of Constantinople, who at once called together a rival council in that place. The Council of Rome, however, is of so much more importance to us that it called into full light in the Western world the great and remarkable figure of Jerome: and still more to our record of the Roman ladies of the Aventine, since it suddenly introduced to them the man whose name is for ever connected with theirs, who is supposed erroneously, as the reader will see, to have been the founder of their community, but who henceforward became its most trusted leader and guide in the spiritual life.

CHAPTER III.
MELANIA

It may be well, however, before continuing this narrative to tell the story of another Roman lady, not of their band, nor in any harmony with them, which had already echoed through the Christian world, a wild romance of enthusiasm and adventure in which the breach of all the decorums of life was no less remarkable than the abandonment of its duties. Some ten years before the formation of Marcella's religious household (the dates are of the last uncertainty) a young lady of Rome, of Spanish origin, rich and noble and of the highest existing rank, found herself suddenly left in the beginning of a splendid and happy life, in desolation and bereavement. Her husband, whose name is unrecorded, died early leaving her with three little children, and shortly after, while yet unrecovered from this crushing blow, another came upon her in the death of her two eldest children, one following the other. The young woman, only twenty-three, thus terribly stricken, seems to have been roused into a fever of excitement and passion by a series of disasters enough to crush any spirit. It is recorded of her that she neither wept nor tore her hair, but advancing towards the crucifix with her arms extended, her head high, her eyes tearless, and something like a smile upon her lips, thanked God who had now delivered her from all ties and left her free to serve Himself. Whether she had previously

entertained this desire, or whether it was only the despair of the distracted mother which expressed itself in such words, we are not told. In the haste and restlessness of her anguish she arranged everything for a great funeral, and placing the three corpses on one bier followed them to Rome to the family mausoleum alone, holding her infant son, the only thing left to her, in her arms. The populace of Rome, eager for any public show, had crowded upon the course of many a triumph, and watched many a high-placed Cæsar return in victory to the applauding city, but never had seen such a triumphal procession as this, Death the Conqueror leading his captives. We are not told whether it was attended by the overflowing charities, extravagant doles and offerings to the poor with which other mourners attempted to assuage their grief, or whether Melania's splendour and solitude of mourning was unsoftened by any ministrations of charity; but the latter is more in accordance with the extraordinary fury and passion of grief, as of a woman injured and outraged by heaven to which she thus called the attention of the spheres.

The impression made by that funeral splendour and by the sight of the young woman following tearless and despairing with her one remaining infant in her arms, had not faded from the minds of the spectators when it was rumoured through Rome that Melania had abandoned her one remaining tie to life and gone forth into the outside world no one knew where, leaving her child so entirely without any arrangement for its welfare that the official charged with the care of orphans had to select a

guardian for this son of senators and consuls as if he had been a nameless foundling. What bitterness of soul lay underneath such an incomprehensible desertion, who could say? It might be a sense of doom such as overwhelms some sensitive minds, as if everything belonging to them were fated and nothing left them but the tragic expedient of Hagar in the desert, "Let me not see the child die." Perhaps the courage of the heartbroken young woman sank before the struggle with pagan relations, who would leave no stone unturned to bring up this last scion of the family in the faith or no-faith of his ancestors; perhaps she was in reality devoid of those maternal instincts which make the child set upon the knee the best comforter of the woman to whom they have brought home her warrior dead. This was the explanation given by the world which tore the unhappy Melania to pieces and held her up to universal indignation. Not even the Christians already touched with the enthusiasm and passion of the pilgrim and ascetic could justify the sudden and mysterious disappearance of a woman who still had so strong a natural bond to keep her in her home. But whatever the character of Melania might be, whether destitute of tenderness, or only distracted by grief and bereavement, and hastening to take her fatal shadow away from the cradle of her child, she was at least invulnerable to any argument or persuasion. "God will take care of him better than I can," she said as she left the infant to his fate. It was probably a better one than had he been the charge of this apparently friendless young woman, with her pagan relations, her

uncompromising enthusiasm and self-will, and with all the risks surrounding her feet which made the path of a young widow in Rome so full of danger; but it is fortunate for the world that few mothers are capable of counting those risks or of turning their backs upon a duty which is usually their best consolation.

There is, however, an interest in the character and proceedings of such an exceptional woman which has always excited the world, and which the thoughtful spectator will scarcely dismiss with the common imputation of simple heartlessness and want of feeling. Melania was a proud patrician notwithstanding that she flung from her every trace of earthly rank or wealth, and a high-spirited, high-tempered individual notwithstanding her subsequent plunge into the most self-abasing ministrations of charity. And these features of character were not altered by her sudden renunciation of all things. She went forth a masterful personage determined, though no doubt unconsciously, to sway all circumstances to her will, though in the utmost self-denial and with all the appearances and surroundings of humility. This is a paradox which meets us on every side, in the records of such world-abandonment as are familiar in every history of the beginnings of the monastic system, in which continually both men and women give up all things while giving up nothing, and carry their individual will and way through circumstances which seem to preclude the exercise of either.

The disappearance of Melania made a great sensation in Rome, and no doubt discouraged Christian zeal and woke doubts

in many minds even while proving to others the height of sacrifice which could be made for the faith. On the other hand the adversary had boundless occasion to blaspheme and denounce the doctrines which, as he had some warrant for saying, thus struck at the very basis of society and weakened every bond of nature. What more dreadful influence could be than one which made a woman forsake her child, the infant whom she had carried in her arms to the great funeral, in the sight of all Rome, the son of her sorrow? Nobody except a hot-headed enthusiast could take her part even among her fellow-Christians, nor does it appear that she sought any support or made any apology for herself. Jerome, then a young student and scholar from the East, was in Rome, in obscurity, still a catechumen preparing for his baptism, at the time of Melania's flight; and though there is no proof that he was even known to her, and no probability that so unknown a person could have anything to do with her resolution, or could have influenced her mind, it was suggested in later times when he was well known, that probably he had much to do – who can tell if not the most powerful and guilty of motives? – in determining her flight. Such a vulgar explanation is always adapted to the humour of the crowd, and gives an easy solution of the problems which are otherwise so difficult to solve. As a matter of fact these two personages, not unlike each other in force and spirit, had much to do with each other, though mostly in a hostile sense, in the after part of their life.

We find Melania again in Egypt, to which presumably she at

once directed her flight as the headquarters of austere devotion and self-sacrifice, on leaving Rome – alone so far as appears. This was in the year 372 (nothing can be more delightful than to encounter from time to time a date, like an angel, in the vague wilderness of letters and narratives), when Athanasius the great Bishop was near his end. The young fugitive, whose arrival in Alexandria would not be attended by such mystery as shrouded her departure from Rome, was received kindly by the dying saint, to whom she had probably been known in her better days, and who in his enthusiasm for the life of monastic privation and sacrifice probably considered her flight and her resolution alike inspired by heaven. He gave her, let us hope, his blessing, and much good counsel – in addition to the sacred sheepskin which had formed the sole garment of the holy Macarius in his cell in the desert, which she carried away with her as her most valued possession. The great Roman lady then pursued her way into the wilderness, which was indeed a wilderness rather in name than in fact, being peopled on every side by communities both of men and women, while in every rocky fissure and cavern were hermits jealously shut each in his hole, the more inaccessible the better. Nothing can be more contradictory than the terms used. This desert of solitaries gave forth the evening hymn over all its extent as if the very sands and rocks sang, so many were the unseen worshippers. And the traveller went into the wilderness alone so to speak, in the utmost self-abnegation and humility, yet attended by an endless retinue of servants whose attendance

was indispensable, if only to convey and protect the store of provisions and presents which she carried with her.

The conception of a lonely figure on the edge of a trackless sandy waste facing all perils, and encountering perhaps after toilsome days of solitude a still more lonely anchorite in his cell, to give her the hospitality of a handful of peas, and a shrine of prayer, which is the natural picture which rises before us – changes greatly when the details are examined. Melania evidently travelled with a great caravanserai, with camels laden with grain and every kind of provision that was necessary to sustain life in those regions. The times were more troublous even than usual. The death of Athanasius was the signal for one of those outbursts of persecution which rent the Christian world in its very earliest ages, and which alas! the Church herself has never been slow to learn the use of. The underground or overground population of the Egyptian desert was orthodox; the powers that were, were Arian; and hermits and cœnobites alike were hunted out of their refuges and dragged before tribunals, where their case was decided before it was heard and every ferocity used against them. In a country so rent by the most violent of agitations Melania passed like an angel of charity. She became the providence of the hunted and suffering monks. She is said for a short period to have provided for five thousand in Nitria, which proves that however secret her disappearance from Rome had been, her address as we should say must have been well known to her bankers, or their equivalent. Thus it is evident that a robe of sackcloth need not

necessarily imply poverty, much less humility, and that a woman may ride about on the most sorry horse (chosen it would seem because it was a more abject thing than the well-conditioned ass of the East) and yet demean herself like a princess.

There is one story told of this primitive Lady Bountiful by Palladius which if it did not recall the action of St. Paul in somewhat similar circumstances would be highly picturesque. The proconsul in Palestine, not at all aware who was the pestilent woman who persisted in supplying and defending the population of the religious which it was his mission to get rid of – even going so far as to visit and nourish them in his prisons – had her arrested to answer for her interference. There is nothing more likely than that Melania remembered the method adopted by St. Paul to bring his judges to his feet. She sent the consul a message in which a certain compassionate scorn mingles with pride. "You esteem me by my present dress," she said, "which it is quite in my power to change when I will. Take care lest you bring yourself into trouble by what you do in your ignorance." This incident happened at Cæsarea, the great city on the Mediterranean shore which Herod had built, and where the prodigious ruins still lie in sombre grandeur capable of restoration to the uses of life. The governor of the Syrian city trembled in his gilded chair. The names which Melania quoted were enough to unseat him half a dozen times over, though, truth to tell, they are not very clearly revealed to the distant student. He hastened to set free the sunburnt pilgrim in her brown gown, and leave her

to her own devices. "One must answer a fool according to his folly," she said disdainfully, as she accepted her freedom. This lady's progress through the haunted deserts, her entrance into town after town, with the shield of rank ready for use in any emergency, attended by continual supplies from the stewards of her estates, and the power of shedding abundance round her wherever she went, could hardly be said to merit the rewards of privation and austerity even if her delicate feet were encased in rude sandals and the cloth of gold replaced by a tunic of rough wool.

Melania had been, presumably for some time before this incident, accompanied by a priest named Rufinus, a fellow-countryman, schoolfellow and dear friend of Jerome, the future Father of the Church, at this period a young religious adventurer if we may use the word: – which indeed seems the only description applicable to the bands of young, devout enthusiasts, who roamed about the world, not bound to any special duties, supporting themselves one knows not how, aiming at one knows not what, except some devotion of mystical religious life, or indefinite Christian service to the world. The object of saving their souls was perhaps for most the prevailing object, and the greater part of them had at least passed a year or two in those Eastern deserts where renunciation of the world had been pushed to its furthest possibilities. But they were also hungry for learning, for knowledge, for disciples, and full of that activity of youth which is bound to go everywhere and see everything

whether with possible means and motives or not. Whatever they were, they were not so far as can be made out missionaries in any sense of the word. They were received wherever they went, in devout households here and there, in any of the early essays at monasteries which existed by bounty and Christian charity, among the abounding dependents of great houses, or by the bishop or other ecclesiastical functionary. They were this man's secretary, that man's tutor – seldom so far as we can see were they employed as chaplains. Rufinus indeed was a priest, but few of the others were so, Jerome himself only having consented to be ordained from courtesy, and in no way fulfilling the duties of the priesthood. There were, however, many offices no doubt appropriate to them in the household of a bishop, who was often the distributor of great charities and the administrator of great possessions. But it is evident that there were always a number of these scholar-student monks available to join any travelling party, to serve their patron with their knowledge of the desert and their general experience of the ways of the world. "To lead about a sister": – St. Paul perhaps had already in his time some knowledge of the usefulness of such a functionary, and of the perfectly legitimate character of his office. Rufinus joined Melania in this way, to all appearance as the other head of the expedition, on perfectly equal terms, though it was her purse which supplied everything necessary. Jerome himself (with a train of brethren behind him) travelled in the same way with Paula – Oceanus with Fabiola. Nothing

could be more completely in accordance with the fashion of the time. Perhaps the young men provided for their own expenses as we say, but the caravan was the lady's and all the immense and indiscriminate charity which flowed from it.

It is not necessary for us to follow the career of Rufinus any more than we intend to follow that of Jerome, into the violent controversy which is the chief link which connects their names, or indeed in any way except that of their association with the women of our tale. Rufinus was a Dalmatian from the shores of the Adriatic, learned enough according to the fashion of his time, though not such a scholar as Jerome, and apt to despise those elegances of literature which he was incapable of appreciating. He too, no doubt, like Jerome, had some following of other men like himself, ready for any adventure, and glad to make themselves the almoners of Melania and form a portion of her train. It is a strange conjunction according to our modern ideas, and no doubt there were vague and flying slanders, such as exist in all ages, accounting for anything that is unusual or mysterious by the worse reasons. But it must be remembered that such partnerships were habitual in those days, permitted by the usage of a time of which absolute purity was the craze and monomania, if we may so speak, as well as the ideal: and also that the solitude of those pilgrims was at all times that of a crowd – the supposed fugitive flying forth alone being in reality, as has been explained already, accompanied on every stage of the way by attendants enough to fill her ship and form her caravan wherever she went.

From Cæsarea, where Melania discomfited the government by her high rank and connections, it is but a little way to Jerusalem, where the steps of the party were directed after their prolonged journey through the desert. It had already become the end of many pilgrimages, the one place in the world which most attracted the hearts and imaginations of the devout throughout all the world; and we can well realise the sensation of the wanderers when they came in sight of that green hill, dominating the scene of so many tragedies, the still half-ruined but immortal city of which the very dust was dear to the primitive Christians. Who that has come suddenly upon that scene in quiet, without offensive guidance or ciceroneship, has not named to himself the Mount of Olives with such a thrill of identification as would move him in scarcely any other landscape in the world? It was still comparatively virgin soil in the end of the fourth century. The Empress Helena had been there, making, as we all feel now, but too easy and too exact discoveries: but the country was unexplored by any vain searchings of curiosity, and the calm of solitude, as perfect and far sweeter than amid the sands of the deserts, was still to be found there. The pilgrims went no further. They chose each their site upon the soft slope of that hill of divine memories. Rufinus took up his abode in a rocky cell, Melania probably in some house in the city, while their monasteries were being built. The great Roman lady with her faithful stewards, always sending those ever valuable supplies, no doubt provided for the expenses of both: and soon two communities arose near

each other preserving the fellowship of their founders, where after some years of travel and movement Melania, with strength and courage restored, took up her permanent abode.

It is difficult to decide what is meant by sacrifice and self-abnegation in this world of human subterfuge and self-deception. It is very likely that Melania, like Paula after her, gave herself to the most humble menial offices, and did not scorn, great lady as she was, to bow the haughty head which had made the proconsul of Palestine tremble, to the modest necessities of primitive life. Perhaps she cooked the spare food, swept the bare cells with her own hands: undoubtedly she would superintend the flocks and herds and meagre fields which kept her community supplied. We know that she rode the sorriest horse, and wore the roughest gown. These things rank high in the catalogue of privations, as privations are calculated in the histories of the saints. And yet it is doubtful how far she is to be credited, if it were a merit, with any self-sacrifice. She had attained the full gratification of her own will and way, which is an advantage not easily or often computed. She had settled herself in the most interesting spot in the world, in the midst of a landscape which, notwithstanding all natural aridity and the depressing effects of ruin everywhere, is yet full of beauty as well as interest. Most of all perhaps she was in the way of the very best of company, receiving pilgrims of the highest eminence, bishops, scholars, princes, sometimes ladies of rank like herself, who were continually coming and going, bringing the great news of the world from every quarter to the recluses

who thus commanded everything that wealth could supply. One may be sure that, as Jerome and Paula afterwards spent many a serene evening in Bethlehem under their trees, Melania and Rufinus would often sit under those hoary olives doubly grey with age, talking of all things in heaven and earth, looking across the little valley to the wall, all the more picturesque that it was broken, and lay here and there in heaps of ruin, of Jerusalem, and hearing, in the pauses of their conversation, the tinkling of that little brook which has seen so many sacred scenes and over which our Lord and His favourite disciples crossed to Gethsemane, on such a night as that on which His servants sat and talked of Him. It is true that the accursed Arians, and grave news of the fight going on between them and the Catholics, or perhaps the question of Origen's orthodoxy, or how the struggle was going between Paulinus and Meletius at Antioch, might occupy them more than those sacred memories. But it is much to be doubted whether any grandeur of Roman living would have been so much to Melania's mind as the convent on the Mount of Olives, the stream of distinguished pilgrims, and the society of her ever devoted companion and friend.

CHAPTER IV.
THE SOCIETY OF MARCELLA

The council which was held in Rome in 382 with the intention of deciding the cases of various contending bishops in distant sees, especially in Antioch where two had been elected for the same seat – a council scarcely acknowledged even by those on whose behalf it was held, and not at all by those opposed to them – was chiefly remarkable, as we have said, from the appearance for the first time, as a marked and notable personage, of one of the most important, picturesque, and influential figures of his time – Jerome: a scholar insatiable in intellectual zeal, who had sought everywhere the best schools of the time and was learned in all their science: and at the same time a monk and ascetic fresh from the austerities of the desert and one of those struggles with the flesh and the imagination which formed the epic of the solitary. It was not unnatural that the régime of extreme abstinence combined with utter want of occupation, and the concentration of all thought upon one's self and one's moods and conditions of mind, should have awakened all the subtleties of the imagination, and filled the brooding spirit with dreams of every wild and extravagant kind; but it would not occur to us now to represent the stormy passage into a life dedicated to religion as filled with dancing nymphs and visions of the grossest sensual enjoyment – above all in the case of such a man as Jerome, whose

chief temptations one would have felt to be of quite another kind. This however was the fashion of the time, and belonged more or less to the monkish ideal, which exaggerated the force of all these lower fleshly impulses by way of enhancing the virtue of him who successfully overcame them. The early fathers all scourged themselves till they were in danger of their lives, rolled themselves in the snow, lay on the cold earth, and lived on a handful of dried grain, perhaps on the grass and wild herbs to be found in the crevices of the rocks, in order to get the body into subjection: which might have been more easily done, we should have supposed, by putting other more wholesome subjects in the place of these visionary temptations, or filling the vacancy of the hours with hard work. But the dulness of an English clown or athlete, in whom muscular exercise extinguishes all visions, would not have been at all to the mind of a monkish neophyte, to whom the sharpest stings of penitence and agonies of self-humiliation were necessary, whether he had done anything to call them forth or not.

Jerome had gone through all these necessary sufferings without sparing himself a pang. His face pale with fasting, and his body so worn with penance and privation that it was almost dead, he had yet felt the fire of earthly passions burning in his soul after the truest orthodox model. "The sack with which I was covered," he says, "deformed my members; my skin and flesh were like those of an Ethiop. But in that vast solitude, burnt up by the blazing sun, all the delights of Rome appeared before

my eyes. Scorpions and wild beasts were my companions, yet I seemed to hear the choruses of dancing girls."

> Finding no succour anywhere, I flung myself at the feet of Jesus, bathing them with tears, drying them with the hair of my head. I passed day and night beating my breast, I banished myself even from my cell, as if it were conscious of all my evil thoughts; and, rigid against myself, wandered further into the desert, seeking some deeper cave, some wilder mountain, some riven rock which I could make the prison of this miserable flesh, the place of my prayers.

Sometimes he endeavoured to find refuge in his books, the precious parchments which he carried with him even in those unlikely regions: but here another temptation came in. "Unhappy that I am," he cries, "I fasted yet read Cicero. After spending nights of wakefulness and tears I found Plautus in my hands." To lay aside dramatist, orator, and poet, so well known and familiar, and plunge into the imperfectly known character of the Hebrew which he was learning, the uncomprehended mysteries and rude style of the prophets, was almost as terrible as to fling himself fasting on the cold earth and hear the bones rattle in the skin which barely held them together. Yet sometimes there were moments of deliverance: sometimes, when all the tears were shed, gazing up with dry exhausted eyes to the sky blazing with stars, "I felt myself transported to the midst of the angels, and full of confidence and joy, lifted up my voice and sang, 'Because of the savour of thy ointments we will run after thee.'" Thus

both were reconciled, his imagination freed from temptation, and the poetry of the crabbed books, which were so different from Cicero, made suddenly clear to his troubled eyes.

This was however but a small part of the training of Jerome. From his desert, as his spirit calmed, he carried on a great correspondence, and many of his letters became at once a portion of the literature of his time. One in particular, an eloquent and oratorical appeal to one of his friends, the Epistle to Heliodorus, with its elaborate description of the evils of the world and impassioned call to the peace of the desert, went through the religious circles of the time with that wonderful speed and facility of circulation which it is so difficult to understand, and was read in Marcella's palace on the Aventine and learnt by heart by some fervent listeners, so precious were its elaborate sentences held to be. This letter boldly proclaimed as the highest principle of life the extraordinary step which Melania, as well as so many other self-devoted persons, had taken – and called every Christian to the desert, whatever duties or enjoyments might stand in the way. Perhaps such exhortations are less dangerous than they seem to be, for the noble ladies who read and admired and learned by heart these moving appeals do not seem to have been otherwise affected by them. Like the song of the Ancient Mariner, they have to be addressed to the predestined, who alone have ears to hear. Heliodorus, upon whom all that eloquence was poured at first hand, turned a deaf ear, and lived and died in peace among his own people, among the lagoons where Venice as yet was not,

notwithstanding all his friend could say.

"What make you in your father's house, oh sluggish soldier?" cried that eager voice; "where are your ramparts and trenches, under what tent of skins have you passed the bitter winter? The trumpet of heaven sounds, and the great Leader comes upon the clouds to overcome the world. Let the little ones hang upon other necks; let your mother rend her hair and her garments; let your father stretch himself on the threshold to prevent you from passing: but arise, come thou! Are you not pledged to the sacrifice even of father and mother? If you believe in Christ, fight with me for His name and let the dead bury their dead." There were many who would dwell upon these entreaties as upon a noble song rousing the heart and charming the ear, but the balance of human nature is but rarely disturbed by any such appeal. Even in that early age we may in the greater number of cases permit it to move all hearers without any great fears for the issue.

Jerome, however, did not himself remain very long in his desert; he was invaded in his very cell by the echoes of polemical warfare drifting in from the world he had left: and was called upon to pronounce himself for one side or the other, while yet, according to his own account, unaware what it was all about. He left his retirement unwillingly after some three years, quoting Virgil as to the barbarity of the race which refused him the hospitality of a little sand, and plunged into the fight at Antioch between contending bishops and parties, the

heresy of Apollinaris, and all the rage of religious polemics. It was probably his intimate acquaintance with all the questions so strongly contested in the East, and his power of giving information on points which the Western Council could only know at second hand, which led him to Rome on the eve of the Council already referred to, called by Pope Damasus, in 382. The primary object of this Council was to settle matters of ecclesiastical polity, and especially the actual question as to which of the competitors was lawful bishop of Antioch, besides other questions concerning other important sees. It was no small assumption on the part of the bishops of the West, an assumption supported in those days by no dogma as to the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome, to interfere in the affairs of the East to this extent. And it was at once crushed by the action of the Church in the East, which immediately held a council of its own at Constantinople, and authoritatively decided every practical question. Jerome was the friend of all those bishops whose causes would have been pleaded at Rome, had not their own section of the Church thus made short work with them: and this no doubt commended him to the special attention of Damasus, even after these practical questions were set aside, and the heresy of Apollinaris, which had been intended to be treated in the second place, was turned into the only subject before the house. Jerome was deeply learned on the subject of Apollinaris too. It was on account of this new heresy that his place in Egypt had become untenable. His knowledge could not but be of the

utmost importance to the Western bishops, who were not as a rule scholars, nor given to the subtle reasoning of the East. He was very welcome therefore in Rome, especially after the illness of the great Ambrose had denuded that Council, shorn of so much of its prestige, of almost the only imposing name left to it. This was the opportunity of such a man as Jerome, in himself, as we have said, still not much different from the many young religious adventurers who scoured the world. He was already, however, a distinguished man of letters: he was known to Damasus, who had baptized him: he had learning enough to supplement the deficiencies of an entire Council, and for once these abilities were fully appreciated and found their right place. He had scarcely arrived in Rome when he was named Secretary of the Council – a temporary office which was afterwards prolonged and extended to that of Secretary to the Pope himself: thus the stranger became at once a functionary of the utmost importance in the proceedings of the See of Rome and in its development as a supreme power and authority in the Church.

There is something strangely familiar and quaint in the appearance, so perfectly known to ourselves, of the gathering of a religious congress, convocation, or general assembly, when every considerable house and hospitable family is moved to receive some distinguished clerical visitor – which thus took place in Rome in the end of the fourth century, while still all was classic in the aspect of the Eternal City, and the altars of the gods were

still standing. The bishops and their trains arrived, making a little stir, sometimes even at the marble porticoes of great mansions where the master or mistress still professed a languid devotion to Jove or Mercury. Jerome, burnt brown by Egyptian suns, meagre and sinewy in his worn robe, with a humble brother or two in his train, accepted, after a little modest difficulty, the invitation or the allotment which led him to the Aventine, to the palace of Marcella, where he was already well known, and where, though his eyes were downcast with a becoming reserve at the sight of all the ladies, he yet felt it right to follow the example of the Apostle and industriously overcome his own bashfulness. It was not perhaps a quality very strong in his nature, and very soon his new and splendid habitation became to the ascetic a home more dear than any he had yet known.

It is curious to find how completely the principle of the association and friendship of a man and woman, failing closer ties, was adopted and recognised among these mystics and ascetics, without apparent fear of the comments of the world, or any of the self-consciousness which so often spoils such a relationship in ordinary society. Perhaps the gossips smiled even then upon the close alliance of Jerome with Paula, or Rufinus with Melania. There were calumnies abroad of the coarsest sort, as was inevitable; but neither monk nor lady seem to have been affected by them. It has constantly been so in the history of the Church, and it is interesting to collect such repeated testimony from the most unlikely quarter, to the advantage of

this natural association. Women have had hard measure from Catholic doctors and saints. Their conventional position, so to speak, is that of the Seductress, always studying how to draw the thoughts of men away from higher things. The East and the West, though so much apart on other points, are at one in this. From the anguish of the fathers in the desert to the supposed difficulties of the humblest ordinary priest of modern times, the disturbing influence is always supposed to be that of the woman. Gruesome figure as he was for any such temptation, Antony of Egypt himself was driven to extremity by the mere thought of her: and it is she who figures as danger or as victim in every ultra-Protestant plaint over the condition of the priest (except in Ireland, wonderful island of contradictions! where priests and all men are more moved to fighting than to love). Yet notwithstanding there has been no founder of ecclesiastical institutions, no reformer, scarcely any saint, who has not been accompanied by the special friendship and affection of some woman. Jerome, who was so much the reverse, if we may venture to use these words, of a drawing-room hero, a man more used to vituperation than to gentleness of speech, often harsh as the desert from which he had come, was a notable example of this rule. From the time of his arrival on the Aventine to that of his death, his name was never dissociated from that of Paula, the pious lady *par excellence* of the group, the exquisite and delicate patrician who could scarcely plant her golden shoe firmly on the floor, but came tottering into Marcella's great house

with a slave on either side to support her, in all the languid grace which was the highest fashion of the time. That such an example of conventional delicacy and luxury should have become the humble friend and secretary of Jerome, and that he, the pious solitary, acrid with opposition and controversy, should have found in this fine flower of society his life-long companion, both in labour and life, is more astonishing than words can say.

His arrival in Marcella's hospitable house, with its crowds of feminine visitors, was in every way a great event. It brought the ladies into the midst of all the ecclesiastical questions of the time: and one can imagine how they crowded round him when he returned from the sittings of the Council – perhaps in the stillness of the evening after the dangerous hour of sunset, when all Rome comes forth to breathe again – assembling upon the marble terrace, from which that magical scene was visible at their feet: the long withdrawing distance beyond the river, out of which some gleam might be apparent of the great church which already covered the tombs of the Apostles, and the white crest of the Capitol close at hand, and the lights of the town scattered dimly like glowworms among the wide openings and level lines of classical building which made the Rome of the time. The subjects discussed were not precisely those which the lighter conventional fancy, Boccaccio or Watteau, has associated with such groups, any more than the dark monk resembled the troubadour. But they were subjects which up to the present day have never lost their interest. The debates of the Council were

chiefly taken up with an extremely abstruse heresy, concerning the humanity of our Lord, how far the nature of man existed in him in connection with the nature of God, and whether the Redeemer of mankind had taken upon himself a mere ethereal appearance of flesh, or an actual human body, tempted as we are and subject to all the influences which affect man. It is a question which has arisen again and again at various periods and in various manners, and the subtleties of such a controversy have proved of the profoundest interest to many minds. Jerome was not alone to report to those eager listeners the course of the debates, and to demolish over again the intricate arguments by which that assembly of divines wrought itself to fever heat. The great Bishop Epiphanius, the great heresy-hunter of his day – who had fathomed all the fallacious reasonings of all the schismatics, and could detect a theological error at the distance of a continent, in whatever garb it might shield itself – was the guest of Paula, and no doubt, along with his hostess, would often join these gatherings. The two doctors thus brought together would vie with each other in making the course of the controversy clear to the women, who hung upon their lips with keen apprehension of every phrase and the enthusiastic partisanship which inspires debate. There could be no better audience for the fine-drawn arguments which such a controversy demands. How strange to think that these hot discussions were going on, and the flower of the artificial society of Rome keenly occupied by such a question, while still the shadow of Jove lingered on the Capitol, and the

Rome of the heathen emperors, the Rome of the great Republic, stood white and splendid, a shadow, yet a mighty one, upon the seven hills!

Before his arrival in Rome, Jerome had been but little known to the general world. His name had been heard in connection with some eloquent letters which had flown about from hand to hand among the finest circles; but his true force and character were better known in the East than in the West, and it was in part this Council which gave him his due place in the ranks of the Church. He was no priest to be promoted to bishoprics or established in high places. He had indeed been consecrated against his will by an enthusiastic prelate, eager to secure his great services to the Church; but, monk and ascetic as he was, he had no inclination towards the sacerdotal character, and had said but one mass, immediately after his ordination, and no more. It was not therefore as spiritual director in the ordinary sense of the words that he found his place in Marcella's house, but at first at least as a visitor merely and probably for the time of the Council alone. But the man of the desert would seem to have been charmed out of himself by the unaccustomed sweetness of that gentle life. He would indeed have been hard to please if he had not felt the attraction of such a retreat, not out of, but on the edge of, the great world, with its excitements and warfare within reach, the distant murmur of the crowd, the prospect of the great city with its lights and rumours, yet sacred quiet and delightful sympathy within. The little community had given

up the luxuries of the age, but they could not have given up the refinements of gentle breeding, the high-born manners and grace, the charm of educated voices and cultivated minds. And there was even more than these attractions to gratify the scholar. Not an allusion could be made to the studies of which he was most proud, the rugged Hebrew which he had painfully mastered, or ornate Greek, but some quick intelligence there would take it up; and the poets and sages of their native tongue, the Cicero and Virgil from whom he could not wean himself even in the desert, were their own literature, their valued inheritance. And not in the most devoted community of monks could the great orator have found such undivided attention and interest in his work as among the ladies of the Aventine, or secretaries so eager and ready to help, so proud to be associated with it. He was at the same time within reach of Bishop Damasus, a man of many experiences, who seems to have loved him as a son, and who not only made him his secretary, but his private counsellor in many difficulties and dangers: and Jerome soon became the centre also of a little band of chosen friends, distinguished personages in Roman society connected in faith and in blood with the sisterhood, whom he speaks of as Daniel, Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, some of whom were his own old companions and schoolfellows, all deeply attached to him and proud of his friendship. No more delightful position could have been imagined for the repose and strengthening of a man who had endured many hardships, and who had yet before him much more to bear.

Jerome remained nearly three years in this happy retreat, and it was here that he executed the first portion of his great work, that first authoritative translation of the entire Canon of Scripture which still retains its place in the Church of Rome – the Vulgate, so named when the Latin of Jerome, which is by no means that of Cicero, was the language of the crowd. In every generation what is called the higher education of women is treated as a new and surprising thing by the age, as if it were the greatest novelty; but we doubt whether Girton itself could produce graduates as capable as Paula and Marcella of helping in this work, discussing the turning of a phrase or the meaning of an abstruse Hebrew word, and often holding their own opinion against that of the learned writer whose scribes they were so willing to be. This undertaking gave a double charm to the life, which went on with much variety and animation, with news from all quarters, with the constant excitement of a new charity established, a new community founded: and never without amusement either, much knowledge of the sayings and doings of society outside, visits from the finest persons, and a daily entertainment in the flutterings of young Blæsilla between the world and the convent, and her pretty ways, so true a woman of the world, yet all the same a predestined saint: and the doings of Fabiola, one day wholly absorbed in the foundation of her great hospital, the first in Rome, the next not so sure in her mind that love, even by means of a second divorce, might not win the day over devotion. Even Paula in these days was but

half decided, and came, a dazzling vision in her jewels and her crown, to visit her friends, in all the pomp of autumnal beauty, among her daughters, of whom that serious little maiden Eustochium was the only one quite detached from the world. For was there not also going on under their eyes the gentle wooing of Pammachius and Paulina to make it apparent to the world that the ladies on the Aventine did not wholly discredit the ordinary ties of life, although they considered with St. Paul that the other was the better way? The lovers were as devout and as much given up to good works as any of them, yet, as even Jerome might pardon once in a way, preferred to the cloister the common happiness of life. These good works were the most wonderful part of all, for every member of the community was rich. Their fortunes were like the widow's cruse. One hears of great foundations like that of Fabiola's hospital and Melania's provision for the monks in Africa, for which everything was sacrificed; yet, next day, next year, renewed beneficences were forthcoming, and always a faithful intendant, a good steward, to continue the bountiful supplies. So wonderful indeed are these liberalities, and so extraordinary the details, that it is surprising to find that no learned German, or other savant, has, as yet, attempted to prove that the fierce and vivid Jerome never existed, that his letters were the work of half a dozen hands, and the subjects of his brilliant narrative altogether fictitious – Melania and Paula being but mythical repetitions of the same incident, wrapt in the colours of fable. This hypothesis might be made to

seem very possible if it were not, perhaps, a little too late in the centuries for the operations of that high-handed criticism, and Jerome himself a very hard fact to encounter.

But the great wealth of these ladies remains one of the most singular circumstances in the story. When they sell and sacrifice everything it is clear it must only be their floating possessions, leaving untouched the capital, as we should say, or the estates, perhaps, more justly, the wealthy source from which the continued stream flowed. This gave a splendour and a largeness of living to the home on the Aventine. There was no need to send any petitioner away empty, charity being the rule of life, and no thought having as yet entered the most elevated mind that to give to the poor was inexpedient for them, and apt to establish a pauper class, dependent and willing to be so. These ladies filled with an even and open hand every wallet and every mouth. They received orphans, they provided for widows, they filled the poor quarters below the hill – where all the working people about the Marmorata clustered near the river bank, in the garrets and courtyards of the old houses – with asylums and places of refuge. The miserable and idle populace of which the historian speaks so contemptuously, the fellows who hung about the circuses, and had no name but the nicknames of coarsest slang, the Cabbage-feeders, the Sausage-eaters, &c., the Porringers and Gluttons, were, no doubt, left all the more free to follow their own foul devices; but the poor women, who though perhaps far from blameless suffer most in the debasement of the

population, and the unhappy little swarms of children, profited by this universal balm of charity, and let us hope grew up to something a little better than their sires. For however paganism might linger among the higher class, the multitudes were all nominally Christian. It was to the tombs of the Apostles that they made their pilgrimages, rather than to the four hundred temples of the gods. "For all its gilding the Capitol looks dingy," says Jerome himself in one of his letters; "every temple in Rome is covered with soot and cobwebs, and the people pour past those half-ruined shrines to visit the tombs of the apostles."

The house of Marcella was in the condition we have attempted to describe when Jerome became its guest. It was in no way more rigid in its laws than at the beginning. The little *ecclesia domestica*, as he happily called it, seems to have been entirely without rule or conventual order. They sang psalms together (sometimes we are led to believe, in the original Hebrew learned for the purpose – but it must have been few who attained to this height), they read together, they held their little conferences on points of doctrine, with much consultation of learned texts; but there is no mention even of any regular religious service, much less of matins, and vespers, and nones and compline, and the other ritualistic divisions of a monastic day; for indeed no rule had been as yet invented for any cœnobites of the West. We do not hear even of a daily mass. Often there were desertions from the ranks, sometimes a young maiden withdrawing from the social enclosure, sometimes a young widow drawn back into the

vortex of the fashionable world. But on the whole the record of the little domestic church, with its bodyguard of faithful friends and servitors outside, and Jerome, its pride and crown of glory, within, is one of serene and happy life, dignified by everything that was best in the antique world.

It was after the arrival of Jerome that the little tragedy of Blæsilla, the eldest daughter of Paula, occurred, rending their gentle hearts. "Our dear widow," as Jerome called her, had no idea of second marriage in her mind. The first, it would appear, had not been happy; and Blæsilla, fair and rich and young, had every mind to enjoy her freedom, her fine dresses, and all the pleasures of her youth. Safely lodged under her mother's wing, with those irreproachable friends 011 the Aventine about her, no gossip touched her gentle name. The community amused itself with her light-hearted ways. "Our widow loves to adorn herself. She is the whole day before her mirror," says Jerome, and there is no harsh tone in his voice. But in the midst of her gay and innocent life she fell ill of a fever, no unusual thing. It lingered, however, more than a month and took a dangerous form, so that the doctors began to despair. When things were at this point Blæsilla had a dream or vision, in her fever, in which the Saviour appeared to her and bade her arise as He had done to Lazarus. It was the crisis of the disease, and she immediately began to recover, with the deepest faith that she had been cured by a miracle. The butterfly was touched beyond measure by this divine interposition, as she believed, in her favour, and as soon

as she was well, made up her mind to devote herself to God. "An extraordinary thing has happened," cries Jerome. "Blæsilla has put on a brown gown! What a scandal is this!" He launches forth thereupon into a diatribe upon the fashionable ladies, with faces of gypsum like idols, who dare not shed a tear lest they should spoil their painted cheeks, and who are the true scandal to Christianity: then narrates with growing tenderness the change that has taken place in the habits of the young penitent. She, whose innocent head was tortured with curls and plaits and crowned with the fashionable *mitella*, now finds a veil enough for her. She lies on the ground who found the softest cushions hard, and is up the first in the morning to sing Alleluia in her silvery voice.

The conversion rang through Rome all the more that Blæsilla was known to have had no inclination toward austerity of life. Her relations, half pagan and altogether worldly, were hot against the fanatic monk, who according to the usual belief tyrannised over the whole house in which he had been so kindly received, and the weak-minded mother who had lent herself to his machinations. The question fired Rome, and became a matter of discussion under every portico and wherever men or women assembled. Was it lawful, had it any warrant in law or history, this new folly of opposing marriage and representing celibacy as a happier and holier state? It was against every tradition of the race; it tore families in pieces, abstracted from society its most brilliant members, alienated the patrimony of families, interfered with

succession and every natural law. In the turmoil raised by this event, a noisy public controversy arose. Two assailants presented themselves, one a priest, who had been for a time a monk, and one a layman, to maintain the popular canon, the superiority of marriage and the natural life of the world. These arguments had a great effect upon the public mind, naturally prone to take fright at any interference with its natural laws. They had very serious results at a later period both in the life of Paula and that of Jerome, and they seem to have threatened for a time serious injury to the newly established convents which Marcella's community had planted everywhere, and from which half-hearted sisters took this opportunity of separating themselves. It is amusing to find that, by a curious and furious twist of the usual argument, Jerome in his indignant and not always temperate defence describes these deserters as old and ugly, and unable to find husbands notwithstanding the most desperate efforts. It has been very common to allege this as a reason for the self-dedication of nuns: and it is always a handy missile to throw.

Jerome was not the man to let any such fine opening for a controversy pass. He burst forth upon his opponents, thundering from the heights of the Aventine, reducing the feeble writers who opposed him to powder. Helvidius, the layman above mentioned, had taken up the question – a question always offensive and injurious to natural sentiment and prejudice, exclusive even of religious feeling, and which, whatever opinions may prevail, it must always be profane to touch – of the Virgin Mary herself, and

the existence of persons called brothers and sisters of our Lord. To him Jerome replied by a flood of angry eloquence, as well as some cogent argument – though argument, however strong, is insupportable on such a subject. And he launched forth upon the other, Jovinian, the false monk, that famous letter on Virginity, nominally addressed to Eustochium, in which one of the most trenchant pictures ever made of society, both lay and clerical – the habits, the ideas, the follies of debased and fallen Rome – is of far more force and importance than the argument, and furnishes us with such a spectacle as very few writers at any time or in any place are capable of placing before the eyes of the world. I have already quoted from this wonderful composition the portrait of the popular priest.

The foolish virgin who puts on an appearance of indifference to worldly things, and "under the ensign of a holy profession draws towards her the regard of men," is treated with equal severity.

> We cast out and banish from our sight those virgins who only wish to seem to be so. Their robes have but a narrow stripe of purple, they let their hair hang about their shoulders, their sleeves are short and narrow, and they have cheap shoes upon their feet. This is all their sanctity. They make by these pretences a higher price for their innocence. Avoid, dear Eustochium, the secret thought that having ceased to court attention in cloth of gold you may begin to do so in mean attire. When you come into an assembly of the brothers and sisters do not, like some, choose the

lowest seat or plead that you are unworthy of a footstool. Do not speak with a faltering voice as if worn out with fasting, or lean upon the shoulders of your neighbours as if fainting. There are some who thus disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to fast. As soon as they are seen, they begin to groan, they look down, they cover their faces, all but one eye. Their dress is sombre, their girdles are of sackcloth. Others assume the mien of men, blushing that they have been born women, who cut their hair short, and walk abroad with effrontery, confronting the world with the impudent faces of eunuchs… I have seen, but will not name, one among the noblest of Rome who in the very basilica of the blessed Peter gave alms with her own hands at the head of her retinue of servants, but struck in the face a poor woman who had twice held out her hand. Flee also the men who wear an iron chain, who have long hair like women against the rule of the Apostle, a miserable black robe, who go barefooted in the cold, and have in appearance at least an air of sadness and anxiety.

The following sketch of the married woman who thinks of the things of the world, how she may please her husband, while the unmarried are free to please God, has an interest long outliving the controversy, in the light it throws upon contemporary Roman life.

Do you think there is no difference between one who spends her time in fastings, and humbles herself night and day in prayer – and her who must prepare her face for the coming of her husband, ornament herself, and put on airs

of fascination? The first veils her beauty and the graces which she despises; the other paints herself before a mirror, to make herself more fair than God has made her. Then come the children, crying, rioting, hanging about her neck, waiting for her kiss. Expenses follow without end, her time is spent in making up her accounts, her purse always open in her hand. Here there is a troop of cooks, their garments girded like soldiers for the battle, hashing and steaming. Then the women spinning and babbling. Anon comes the husband, followed by his friends. The wife flies about like a swallow from one end of the house to the other, to see that all is right, the beds made, the marble floors shining, flowers in the vases, the dinner prepared. Is there in all that, I ask, a thought of God? Are these happy homes? No, the fear of God is absent there, where the drum is sounded, the lyre struck, where the flute breathes out and the cymbals clash. Then the parasite abandons shame and glories in it, if he amuses the host who has invited him. The victims of debauch have their place at these feasts; they appear half naked in transparent garments which unclean eyes see through. What part is there for the wife in these orgies? She must learn to take pleasure in such scenes, or else to bring discord into her house.

He paints for us, in another letter, a companion picture of the widow remarried.

Your contract of marriage will scarcely be written when you will be compelled to make your will. Your new husband pretends to be very ill, and makes a will in your favour,

> desiring you to do the same. But he lives, and it is you who die. And if it happens that you have sons by your second marriage, war blazes forth in your house, a domestic contest without term or conclusion. Those who owe life to you, you are not permitted to love equally, fully. The second envies the caress which you give to the son of the first. If, on the contrary, it is he who has children by another wife, although you may be the most loving of mothers, you are condemned as a stepmother by all the rhetoric of the comedies, the pantomimes, and orators. If your stepson has a headache you have poisoned him. If he eats nothing you starve him, if you serve him his food it is worse still. What compensation is there in a second marriage to make up for so many woes?

This tremendous outburst and others of a similar kind raised up, as was natural, a strong feeling against Jerome. It was not likely that the originals of these trenchant sketches would forgive easily the man who put them up in effigy on the very walls of Rome. That the pictures were identified was clear from another letter, in which he asks whether he is never to speak of any vice or folly lest he should offend a certain Onasus, who took everything to himself. Little cared he whom he offended, or what galled jade might wince. But at last the remonstrances of his friends subdued his rage. "When you read this you will bend your brows and check my freedom, putting a finger on my mouth to stop me from speaking," he wrote to Marcella. It was full time that the prudent mistress of the house which contained such a champion should interfere.

While still the conflict raged which had been roused by the retirement of Blæsilla from the world, and which had thus widened into the general question, far more important than any individual case, between the reforming party in the Church, the Puritans of the time – then specially represented by the new development of monasticism – and the world which it called all elevated souls to abandon: incidents were happening which plunged the cheerful home on the Aventine into sorrow and made another noble house in Rome desolate. The young convert in the bloom of her youthful devotion, who had been raised up miraculously as they all thought from her sick bed in order that she might devote her life to Christ, was again struck down by sickness, and this time without any intervention of a miracle. Blæsilla died in the fulness of her youth, scarcely twenty-two, praying only that she might be forgiven for not having been able to do what she had wished to do in the service of her Lord. She was a great lady, though she had put her natural splendour away from her, and it was with all the pomp of a patrician funeral that she was carried to her rest. It is again Jerome who makes visible to us the sad scene of this funeral, and the feeling of the multitude towards the austere reformers who had by their cruel exactions cut off this flower of Roman society before her time. Paula, the bereaved mother, followed, as was the custom, the bier of her daughter through the crowded streets of Rome, scarcely able in the depths of her grief to support herself, and at last fell fainting into the arms of the attendants and had to be

carried home insensible. At this sight, which might have touched their hearts, the multitude with one voice cried out against the distracted mother. "She weeps, the daughter whom she has killed with fastings," they cried. "Why are not these detestable monks driven from the city? why are they not stoned or thrown into the river? It is they who have seduced this miserable woman to be herself a monk against her will – this is why she weeps for her child as no woman has ever wept before." Paula, let us hope, did not hear these cries of popular rage. The streets rung with them, the populace always ready for tumult, and the disgusted and angry nobles encouraging every impulse towards revolt. No doubt many of the higher classes had looked on with anxiety and alarm at the new movement which dissipated among the poor so many fine inheritances and threatened to carry off out of the world, of which they had been the ornaments, so many of the most distinguished women. Any sudden rising which might kill or banish the pestilent monk or disperse the troublesome community would naturally find favour in their eyes.

CHAPTER V.
PAULA

Paula was a woman of very different character from the passionate and austere Melania who preceded and resembled her in many details of her career. Full of tender and yet sprightly humour, of love and gentleness and human kindness, a true mother benign and gracious, yet with those individualities of lively intelligence, understanding, and sympathy which quicken that mild ideal and bring in all the elements of friendship and the social life – she was the most important of those visitors and associates who made the House on the Aventine the fashion, and filled it with all that was best in Rome. Though her pedigree seems a little delusive, her relationship to Æmilius Paulus resolving itself into a descent from his sister through her own mother, it is yet apparent that her claims of the highest birth and position were fully acknowledged, and that no Roman matron held a higher or more honourable place. She was rich as they all were, highly allied, the favourite of society, neglecting none of its laws, though always with a love of intellectual intercourse and a tendency to devotion. Which of these tendencies drew her first towards Marcella and her little society we cannot tell: but it is evident that both found satisfaction there, and were quickened by the strong impulse given by Jerome when he came out of the schools and out of the wilds, at once Scholar and Hermit,

to this house of friendship, the Ecclesia Domestica of Rome. That all this rising tide of life, the books, the literary work, the ever-entertaining companionship, as well as the higher influence of a life of self-denial and renunciation, as understood in those days – should have at first added a charm even to that existence upon its border, the life in which every motive contradicted the new law, is very apparent. Many a great lady, deeply plunged in all the business of the world, has felt the same attraction, the intense pleasure of an escape from those gay commotions which in the light of the other life seem so insignificant and wearisome, the sensation of rest and tranquillity and something higher, purer, in the air – which yet perhaps at first gave a zest to the return into the world, in itself once more a relief from that higher tension and those deeper requirements. The process by which the attraction grew is very comprehensible also. Common pleasures and inane talk of society grow duller and duller in comparison with the conversation full of wonders and revelations which would keep every faculty in exercise, the mutual studies, the awe yet exhilaration of mutual prayers and psalms, the realisation of spiritual things. And no doubt the devout child's soul so early fixed, the little daughter who had thought of nothing from her cradle but the service of God, must have drawn the ever-tender, ever-sympathetic mother still nearer to the centre of all. The beautiful mother among her girls, one betrothed, one self-consecrated, one in all the gay emancipation of an early widowhood, affords the most charming picture among

the graver women – women all so near to each other in nature, – mutually related, members of one community, linked by every bond of common association and tradition.

When Blæsilla on her recovery from her illness threw off her gaieties and finery, put on the brown gown, and adopted all the rules of the community, the life of Paula, trembling between two spheres, was shaken by a stronger impulse than ever before. But how difficult was any decision in her circumstances! She had her boy and girl at home as yet undeveloped – her only boy, dragged as much as might be to the other side, persuaded to think his mother a fanatic and his sisters fools. Paula did all she could to combine the two lives, indulging perhaps in an excess of austerities under the cloth of gold and jewels which, as symbols of her state and rank, she could not yet put off. The death of Blæsilla was the shock which shattered her life to pieces. Even the coarse reproaches of the streets show us with what anguish of mourning this first breach in her family overwhelmed her. "This is why she weeps for her child as no woman has ever wept before," the crowd cried, turning her sorrow into an accusation, as if she had thus acknowledged her own fault in leaving Blæsilla to privations she was not able to endure. Did the cruel censure perhaps awake an echo in her heart, ready as all hearts are in that moment of prostration to blame themselves for something neglected, something done amiss? At least it would remind Paula that she herself had never made completely this sacrifice which her child had made with such fatal effect. She was altogether

overcome by her sorrow: her sobs and cries rent the hearts of her friends. She refused all food, and when exhausted by the paroxysms of violent grief fell into a lethargy of despair more alarming still. When every one else had tried their best to draw her from this excess of affliction, the ladies had recourse to Jerome in their extremity: for it was clear that Paula must be roused from this collapse of all courage and hope, or she must die.

Jerome did not refuse to answer the appeal: though helpless as even the most anxious affection is in face of this anguish of the mother which will not be comforted, he did what he could; he wrote to her from the house of their friends who shared yet could not still her sorrow, a letter full of grief and sympathy, in the forlorn hope of bringing her back to life. Such letters heaven knows are common enough. We have all written, and most of us have received them, and found in their tender arguments, in their assurances of final good and present fellow feeling, only fresh pangs and additional sickness of heart. Yet Jerome's letter was not of a common kind. No one could have touched the shrinking heart with a softer touch than this fierce controversialist, this fiery and remorseless champion: for he had yet a more effectual spell to move the mourner, in that he was himself a mourner, not much less deeply touched than she. "Who am I," he cries, "to forbid the tears of a mother who myself weep? This letter is written in tears. He is not the best consoler whom his own groans master, whose being is un-manned, whose broken

words distil into tears. Yes, Paula, I call to witness Christ Jesus whom our Blæsilla now follows, and the angels who are now her companions, I, too, her father in the spirit, her foster-father in affection, could also say with you – Cursed be the day that I was born. Great waves of doubt surge over my soul as over yours. I, too, ask myself why so many old men live on, why the impious, the murderers, the sacrilegious, live and thrive before our eyes, while blooming youth and childhood without sin are cut off in their flower." It is not till after he has thus wept with her that he takes a severer tone. "You deny yourself food, not from desire of fasting, but of sorrow. If you believed your daughter to be alive, you would not thus mourn that she has migrated to a better world. Have you no fear lest the Saviour should say to you, 'Are you angry, Paula, that your daughter has become my daughter? Are you vexed at my decree, and do you with rebellious tears grudge me the possession of Blæsilla?' At the sound of your cries Jesus, all-clement, asks, 'Why do you weep? the damsel is not dead but sleepeth.' And when you stretch yourself despairing on the grave of your child, the angel who is there asks sternly, 'Why seek ye the living among the dead?'"

In conclusion Jerome adds a wonderful vow: "So long as breath animates my body, so long as I continue in life, I engage, declare and promise that Blæsilla's name shall be for ever on my tongue, that my labours shall be dedicated to her honour, and my talents devoted to her praise." It was the last word which the enthusiasm of tenderness could say: and no doubt the fervour and

warmth of the promise, better kept than such promises usually are, gave a little comfort to the sorrowful soul.

When Paula came back to the charities and devotions of life after this terrible pause a bond of new friendship was formed between her and Jerome. They had wept together, they bore the reproach together, if perhaps their trembling hearts might feel there was any truth in it, of having possibly exposed the young creature they had lost to privations more than she could bear. But it is little likely that this modern refinement of feeling affected these devoted souls; for such privations were in their eyes the highest privileges of life, and in fasting man was promoted to eat the food of angels. At all events, the death of Blæsilla made a new bond between them, the bond of a mutual and most dear remembrance never to be forgotten.

This natural consequence of a common sorrow inflamed the popular rage against Jerome to the wildest fury. Paula's relations and connections, half of them, as in most cases in the higher ranks of society, still pagan – who now saw before them the almost certain alienation to charitable and religious purposes of Paula's wealth, pursued him with calumny and outrage, and did not hesitate to accuse the lady and the monk of a shameful relationship and every crime. To make things worse, Damasus, whose friend and secretary, almost his son, Jerome had been, died a few months after Blæsilla, depriving him at once of that high place to which the Pope's favour naturally elevated him. He complains of the difference which his close connection with

Paula's family had made on the general opinion of him. "All, almost without exception, thought me worthy of the highest sacerdotal position; there was but one word for me in the world. By the mouth of the blessed Damasus it was I who spoke. Men called me holy, humble, eloquent." But all this had changed since the recent events in Paula's house. She on her side, wounded to the heart by the reproaches poured upon her, and the shameful slanders of which she was the object, and which had no doubt stung her into renewed life and energy, resolved upon a step stronger than that of joining the community, and announced her intention of leaving Rome, seeking a refuge in the holy city of Jerusalem, and shaking the dust of her native country, where she had been so vilified, from her feet. This resolution was put to Jerome's account as might have been expected, and when his patron's death left him without protection every enemy he had ever made, and no doubt they were many, was let loose. He whom courtiers had sought, whose hands had been kissed and his favour implored by all who sought anything from the Pope, was now greeted when he appeared in the streets by fierce cries of "Greek," "Impostor," "Monk," and his presence became a danger for the peaceful house in which he had found a refuge.

It is scarcely possible to be very sorry for Jerome. He had not minced his words; he had flung libels and satires about that must have stung and wounded many, and in such matters reprisals are inevitable. But Paula had done no harm. Even granting the case that Blæsilla's health had been ruined by fasting, the mother

herself had gone through the same privations and exulted in them: and her only fault was to have followed and sympathised in, with enthusiasm, the new teaching and precepts of the divine life in the form which was most highly esteemed in her time. No cry from that silent woman comes into the old world, ringing with so many outcries, where the rude Roman crowd bellowed forth abuse, and the ladies on their silken couches whispered the scandal of Paula's liaison to each other, and the men scoffed and sneered over their banquets at the mere thought of such a friendship being innocent. Some one of their enemies ventured to speak or write publicly the vile accusation, and was instantly brought to book by Jerome, and publicly forswore the scandal he had spread. "But," as Jerome says, "a lie is hard to kill; the world loves to believe an evil story: it puts its faith in the lie, but not in the recantation." And the situation of affairs became such that he too saw no expedient possible but that of leaving Rome. He would seem to have been, or to have imagined himself, in danger of his life, and his presence was unquestionably a danger for his friends. A man of more patient temperament and quiet mind might have thought that Paula's resolution to go away was a reason for him to stay, and thus to bear the scandal and outrage alone, at least until she was safe out of its reach – giving no possible occasion for the adversary to blaspheme. But Jerome was evidently not disposed to any such self-abnegation, and indeed it is very likely that his position had become intolerable and that his only resource was departure. It

was in the summer of 385, nearly three years after his arrival in Rome – in August, seven months after the death of Damasus, and not a year after that of Blæsilla, that he left "Babylon," as he called the tumultuous city, writing his farewell with tears of grief and wrath to the Lady Asella, now one of the eldest and most important members of the community, and thanking God that he was found worthy of the hatred of the world. We are apt to speak as if travelling were an invention of our time: but as a matter of fact facilities of travelling then existed little inferior to those we ourselves possessed thirty or forty years ago, and it was no strange or unusual journey from Ostia at the mouth of the Tiber, by the soft Mediterranean shores, past the vexed rocks of the Sirens in the blazing weather, to Cyprus that island of monasteries, and Antioch a vexed and heresy-tainted city yet full of friends and succour. Jerome had a cluster of faithful followers round him, and was escorted by a weeping crowd to the very point of his embarkation: but yet swept forth from Rome in a passion of indignation and distress.

It was while waiting for the moment of departure in the ship that was to carry him far from his friends and the life he loved, that Jerome's letters to Asella were written. They were full of anger and sorrow, the utterance of a heart sore and wounded, of a man driven almost to despair. "I am said," he cries, "to be an infamous person, a deceiver full of guile, an impostor with all the arts of Satan at his fingers' ends… These men have kissed my hands in public, and stung me in secret with a viper's tooth;

they compassionate me with their lips and rejoice in their hearts. But the Lord saw them, and had them in derision, reserving them to appear with me, his unfortunate servant, at the last judgment. One of them ridicules my walk, and my laugh: another makes of my features a subject of accusation: to another the simplicity of my manners is the evil thing: and I have lived three years in the company of such men!" He continues his indignant self-defence as follows:

"I have lived surrounded by virgins, and to some of them I explained as best I could the divine books. With study came an increased knowledge of each other, and with that knowledge mutual confidence. Let them say if they have ever found anything in my conduct unbecoming a Christian. Have I not refused all presents, great or small? Gold has never sounded in my palm. Have they heard from my lips any doubtful word, or seen in my eyes a bold or hazardous look? Never, and no one dares say so. The only objection to me is that I am a man: and that objection only appeared when Paula announced her intention of going to Jerusalem. They believed my accuser when he lied: why do they not believe him when he retracts? He is the same man now as then. He imputed false crimes to me, now he declares me innocent. What a man confesses under torture is more likely to be true than that which he gives forth in a moment of gaiety: but people are more prone to believe such a lie than the truth.

"Of all the ladies in Rome Paula only, in her mourning and fasting, has touched my heart. Her songs were psalms, her

conversations were of the Gospel, her delight was in purity, her life a long fast. But when I began to revere, respect, and venerate her, as her conspicuous virtue deserved, all my good qualities forsook me on the spot.

"Had Paula and Melania rushed to the baths, taken advantage of their wealth and position to join, perfumed and adorned, in one worship God and their wealth, their freedom and pleasure, they would have been known as great and saintly ladies; but now it is said they seek to be admired in sackcloth and ashes, and go down to hell laden with fasting and mortifications: as if they could not as well have been damned along with the rest, amid the applauses of the crowd. If it were Pagans and Jews who condemned them, they would have had the consolation of being hated by those who hated Christ, but these are Christians, or men known by that name.

"Lady Asella, I write these lines in haste, while the ship spreads its sails. I write them with sobs and tears, yet giving thanks to God to have been found worthy of the hatred of the world. Salute Paula and Eustochium, mine in Christ whether the world pleases or not, salute Albina your mother, Marcella your sister, Marcellina, Felicita: say to them that we shall meet again before the judgment seat of God, where the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. Remember me, oh example of purity! and may thy prayers tranquillise before me the tumults of the sea!"

The agitation with which the community of ladies must have received such a letter may easily be imagined. They were better

able than any others to judge of the probity and honour of the writer who had lived among them so long: and no doubt all these storms raging about, the injurious and insulting imputations, all the evil tongues of Rome let loose upon the harmless house, their privacy invaded, their quiet disturbed, must, during the whole course of the deplorable incident, have been the cause of pain and trouble unspeakable to the gentle society on the Aventine. Marcella it is evident had done what she could to stop the mouth of Jerome when the trouble began; it is perhaps for this reason that the letter of farewell is addressed to the older Asella, perhaps a milder judge.

Paula's preparations had begun before Jerome had as yet thought of his more abrupt departure. They were not so easily made as those of a solitary already detached from the world. She had all her family affairs to regulate, and, what was harder still, her children to part with, the most difficult of all, and the special point in her conduct with which it is impossible for us to sympathise. But it must be remembered that Paula, a spotless matron, had been branded with the most shameful of slanders, that she had been shrieked at by the crowd as the slayer of her daughter, and accused by society of having dishonoured her name. She had been the subject of a case of libel, as we should say, before the public courts, and though the slanderer had confessed his falsehood (under the influence of torture it would seem, according to the words of Jerome), the imputation, as in most cases, remained. Outraged and wounded to the quick,

it is very possible that she may have thought that it was well for her younger children that she should leave them, that they might not remain under the wing of a mother whose name had been bandied about in the mouths of men. Her daughter Paulina was by this time married to the good and faithful Pammachius, whose protection might be of greater advantage to the younger girl and boy than her own. And Paula had full knowledge of the tender mercies of her pagan relations, and of the influence they were likely to exercise against her, even in her own house. The staid young Eustochium, grave and calm, clung to her mother's side, her youthful head already covered by the veil of the dedicated virgin, a serene and unfaltering figure in the midst of all the agitations of the parting. All Rome poured forth to accompany them to the port, brothers and sisters with their wives and husbands, relations less near, a crowd of friends. All the way along the winding banks of the Tiber they plied Paula with entreaties and reproaches and tears. She made them no reply. She was at all times slow to speak, as the tender chronicle reports. "She raised her eyes to heaven, pious towards her children but more pious to God." She retained her self-command until the vessel began to move from the shore, where little Toxotius, the boy of ten years old, stood stretching out his hands to her in a last appeal, his sister Rufina silent, with wistful eyes, by his side. Paula's heart was like to burst. She turned her eyes away unable to bear that cruel sight, while Eustochium, firm and steadfast, supported her weaker mother in her arms.

Was it a cruel desertion, a heartless abandonment of duty? Who can tell? There are desertions, cruelties in this kind, which are the highest sacrifice, and sometimes the most bitter proof of self-devotion. Did Paula in her heart believe, most painful thought that can enter a mother's mind, that her boy would be better without her, brought up in peace among his uncles and guardians, who, had she been there, would have made his life a continual struggle between two sides? Was Rufina more likely to be happy in her gentle sister's charge, than with her mind disturbed, and perhaps her marriage spoiled, by her mother's religious vows, and all that was involved in them? She might be wrong in thinking so, as we are all wrong often in our best and most painfully pondered plans. But condemnation is very easy, and gives so little trouble – there is surely a word to be said on the other side of the question.

When these pilgrims leave Rome they cease to have any part in the story of the great city with which we have to do. Yet their after-fate may be stated in a few words. No need to follow the great lady in her journey over land and sea to the Holy Land with all its associations, where Jerusalem out of her ruins, decked with a new classic name, was already rising again into the knowledge and the veneration of the world. These were not the days of excursion trains and steamers, it is true; but the number of pilgrims ever coming and going to those more than classic shores, those holy places, animated with every higher hope, was perhaps greater in proportion to the smaller size and less population of

the known world than are our many pilgrimages now, though this seems so strange a thing to say. But is there not a Murray, a Baedeker, of the fourth century, still existent, the *Itinéraire de Bordeaux à Jerusalem*, unquestioned and authentic, containing the most careful account of inns and places of refuge and modes of travel for the pilgrims? It is possible that the lady Paula may have had that ancient roll in her satchel, or slung about the shoulders of her attendant for constant reference. Her ship was occupied by her own party alone, and conveyed, no doubt, much baggage and many provisions as an emigration for life would naturally do; and it was hindered by no storms, as far as we hear, but only by a great calm which delayed the vessel much and made the voyage tedious, necessitating the use of the galley's oars, which very likely the ladies would like best, though it kept them so many more days upon the sea. They reached Cyprus at last, that holy island now covered with monasteries, where Epiphanius, once Paula's guest in Rome, awaited and received her with every honour, and where there were many visits to be paid to monks and nuns in their new establishments, the favourite dissipation of the cloister. The ladies afterwards continued their voyage to Antioch, where they met Jerome; and proceeded on their journey, having probably had enough of the sea, along the coast by Tyre and Sidon, by Herod's splendid city of Cæsarea, and Joppa with its memories of the Apostles – not without a thought of Andromeda and her monster as they looked over the dark and dangerous reefs which still scare the traveller: for

they loved literature, notwithstanding their separation from the world. They formed by this time a great caravanserai, not unlike, to tell the truth, one of those parties which we are so apt to despise, under charge of guides and attendants who wear the livery of Cook. But such an expedition was far more dignified and important in those distant days. Jerome and his monks made but one family of sisters and brothers with the Roman ladies and their followers, who endured so bravely all the fatigues and dangers of the way. Paula the pilgrim was no longer a tottering fine lady, but the most animated and interested of travellers, with no mere mission of hermit-hunting like Melania, but the truest human enthusiasm for all the storied scenes through which she passed. When they reached Jerusalem she went in a rapture of tears and exaltation from one to another of the sacred sites, kissing the broken stone which was supposed to have been that which was rolled against the door of the Holy Sepulchre, and following with pious awe and joy the steps of Helena into the cave where the True Cross was found. The legend was still fresh in those days, and doubts there were none. The enthusiasm of Paula, the rapture and exaltation, which found vent in torrents of tears, in ecstasies of sacred emotion, joy and prayer, moved all the city, thronged with pilgrims, devout and otherwise, to whom the great Roman lady was a wonder: the crowd followed her about from point to point, marvelling at her devotion and the warmth of natural feeling which in all circumstances distinguished her. The reader cannot but follow still with admiring interest a figure

so fresh, so unconventional, so profoundly touched by all those holy and sacred associations. Amid so many who are represented as almost more abstracted among spiritual thoughts than nature permits, her frank emotion and tender, natural enthusiasm are always a refreshment and a charm.

We come here upon a break in the hitherto redundant story. Melania and Rufinus were in possession of their convents, and fully established as residents on the Mount of Olives, when the other pilgrims arrived; and there can be but little doubt that every grace of hospitality was extended by the one Roman lady to the other, as well as by the old companions of Jerome to her friend. But in the course of the after-years these dear friends quarrelled bitterly, not on personal matters, so far as appears, but on points of doctrine, and fell into such prolonged warfare of angry and stinging words as hurt more than blows. By means of this very intimacy they knew everything that had ever been said or whispered of each other, and in the heat of conflict did not hesitate to use every old insinuation, every suggestion that could hurt or wound. The struggle ran so high that the after-peace of both parties was seriously affected by it; and one of its most significant results was that Jerome, a man great enough and little enough for anything, either in the way of spitefulness or magnanimity, cut off from his letters and annals all mention of this early period of peace, and all reference to Melania, whom he is supposed to have praised so highly in his first state of mind that it became impossible in his second to permit these expressions

of amity to be connected with her name. This is a melancholy explanation of the silence which falls over the first period of Paula's residence in Palestine, but it is a very natural one: and both sides were equally guilty. The quarrel happened, however, years after the first visit, which we have every reason to believe was all friendliness and peace.

After this first pause at Jerusalem, the caravanserai got under way again and set out on a long journey through all the scenes of the Old Testament, the storied deserts and ruins of Syria, not much less ancient to the view and much less articulate than now. This was in the year 387, two years after their departure from Rome. Even now, with all our increased facilities for travel – neutralised as they are by the fact that these wild and desert lands will probably never be adapted to modern methods – the journey would be a very long and fatiguing business. Jerome and his party "went everywhere," as we should say; they were daunted by no difficulties. No modern lady in deer-stalker's costume could have shrunk less from any dangerous road than the once fastidious Paula. They stopped everywhere, receiving the ready hospitality of the convents in every awful pass of the rocks and stony waste where such homes of penance were planted. Those wildernesses of ruin, from which our own explorers have picked carefully out some tradition of Gilgal or of Ziklag, some Philistine stronghold or Jewish city of refuge – were surveyed by these adventurers fourteen hundred years ago, when perhaps there was greater freshness of tradition, but none of the aids of science to decipher

what would seem even more hoary with age to them than it does to us. How trifling in our pretences at exploration do the luxurious parties of the nineteenth century seem, abstracted from common life for a few months at the most, and with all the resources of civilisation to fall back upon, in comparison with that of these patient wanderers, eating the Arab bread and clotted milk, and such fare as was to be got at, finding shelter among the dark-skinned ascetics of the desert communities, taking refuge in the cave which some saint but a day or two before had inhabited, wandering everywhere, over primeval ruin and recent shrine!

When they came back from these savage wildernesses to green Bethlehem standing up on its hillside over the pleasant fields, the calm and sweetness of the place went to their hearts. It was in this sacred spot that they decided to settle themselves, building their two convents, Jerome's upon the hill near the western gate, Paula's upon the smiling level below. He is said to have sold all that he had, some remains of personal property in Dalmatia belonging to himself and his brother, who was his faithful and constant companion, to provide for the expenses of the building, on his side; and no doubt the abundant wealth of Paula supplemented all that was wanting. Gradually a conventual settlement, such as was the ideal of the time, gathered in this spot. After her own convent was finished Paula built two others near it, which were soon filled with dedicated sisters. And she built a hospice for the reception of travellers, so that, as she said with tender smiles and tears, "If Joseph and Mary should return

to Bethlehem, they might be sure of finding room for them in the inn." This soft speech shines like a gleam of tender light upon the little holy city with all its memories, showing us the great lady of old in her gracious kindness, full of noble natural kindness, and seeing in every poor pilgrim who passed that way some semblance of that simple pair, who carried the Light of the World to David's little town among the hills.

All these homes of piety and charity are swept away, and no tradition even of their site is left; but there is one storied chamber that remains full of the warmest interest of all. It is the rocky room, in one of the half caves, half excavations close to that of the Nativity, and communicating with it by rudely hewn stairs and passages, in which Jerome established himself while his convent was building, which he called his Paradise, and which is for ever associated with the great work completed there. All other traditions and memories grow dim in the presence of the great and sacred interest of the place. Yet it will be impossible even there for the spectator who knows their story to stand unmoved in the scene, practically unaltered since their day, where Jerome laboured at his great translation, and Paula and Eustochium copied, compared, and criticised his daily labours. A great part of the Vulgate had been completed in Rome, but since leaving that city Jerome had much increased his knowledge of Hebrew, losing no opportunity, during his travels, of studying the language with every learned Rabbi he encountered, and acquiring much information in respect to the views and readings of the

doctors in the law. He took the opportunity of his retirement at Bethlehem to revise what was already done and to finish the work. His two friends had both learned Hebrew in a greater or less degree before leaving Rome. They had no doubt shared his studies on the way. They read with him daily a portion of the Scriptures in the original; and it was at their entreaty and with their help that he began the translation of the Psalms, so deeply appropriate to this scene, in which the voice of the shepherd of Bethlehem could almost be heard, singing as he led his flock about the little hills. I quote from M. Amédée Thierry a sympathetic description of the method of this work as it was carried out in the rocky chamber at Bethlehem, or in the convent close by.

> His two friends charged themselves with the task of collecting all the materials, and this edition, prepared by their care, is that which remains in the Church under Jerome's name. We have his own instructions to them for this work, even to the lines traced for greater exactness, and the explanation of the signs which he had adopted in the collation of the different versions with his text, sometimes a line underscored, sometimes an obelisk or asterisk. A comma followed by two points indicated the cutting out of superfluous words coming from some paraphrase of the Septuagint; a star followed by two points showed, on the contrary, where passages had to be inserted from the Hebrew; another mark denoted passages borrowed from the translation of Theodosius, slightly different from the

> Septuagint as to the simplicity of the language. In reading these various symbols it is pleasant to think of the two noble Roman ladies seated before the vast desk upon which were spread the numerous manuscripts, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin – the Hebrew text of the Bible, the different editions of the Septuagint, the Hexapla of Origen, Theodosius, Symmachus, Aquila, and the Italian Vulgate – whilst they examined and compared, reducing to order under their hands, with piety and joy, that Psalter of St. Jerome which we still sing, at least the greater part of it, in the Latin Church at the present day.

It is indeed a touching association with that portion of Scripture which next to the Gospel is most dear to the devout, that the translation still in daily use throughout the churches of Continental Europe, the sonorous and noble words which amid all the babble of different tongues still form a large universal language, of which all have at least a conventional understanding – should have been thus transcribed and perfected for the use of the generations. Jerome is no gentle hero, and, truth to tell, has never been much loved in the Church which yet owes so much to him. Yet there is no other work of the kind which carries with it so many soft and tender associations. The cave at Bethlehem is as little adapted as a scene for that domestic combination as Jerome is naturally adapted to be its centre. And no doubt there are unkindly critics who will describe this austere yet beautiful interior as the workshop of two poor female slaves dragged after him by the tyranny of their grim taskmaster to do his work for

him. No such idea is consistent with the record. The gentle Paula was a woman of high spirit as well as of much grace and courtesy, steadfastness and humour, the last the most unusual quality of all. The imaginative devotion which had induced her to learn Hebrew in order to sing the Psalmist's songs in the original, among the little band of Souls, under Marcella's gilded roof, had its natural evolution in the gentle pressure laid upon Jerome to make of them an authoritative translation: and where could so fit a place for this work have been found as in the delightful rest after their travels were over, in the very scene where these sacred songs were first begun? It would be almost as impertinent and foolish to suppose that any modern doubt of their authenticity existed in Paula's mind as to suggest that these were forced and dreary labours to which she was driven by a spiritual tyrant. To our mind this mutual labour and study adds the last charm to their companionship. The sprightly, gentle woman who shed so much light over that curious self-denying yet self-indulgent life, and the grave young daughter who never left her side, whose gentle shadow is one with her, so that while Paula lived we cannot distinguish them apart – must have found a quiet happiness above all they had calculated on in this delightful intercourse and work. Their minds and thoughts occupied by the charm of noble poetry, by the puzzle of words to be cleared and combined aright, and by constant employment in a matter which interested them so deeply, which is perhaps the best of all – must have drawn closer and ever closer, mother to child, and child to mother, as well as

both to the friend and father whom they delighted to serve, and whose large intellect and knowledge kept theirs going in constant sympathy – not unmingled with now and then a little opposition, and the pleasant stir of independent opinion.

It is right to give Jerome himself, so fierce in quarrel and controversy, the advantage of this gentle lamp which burns for ever in his little Paradise. And can any one suppose that Paula, once so sensitive and exquisite, now strong and vigorous in the simplicity of that retirement, with her hands full and her mind, plenty to think of, plenty to do, had not her advantage also? The life would be ideal but for the thought that must have come over her by times, of the young ones left in Rome, and what was happening to them. She was indeed prostrated by grief again and again by the death of her daughters there, one after another, and mourned with a bitterness which makes us wonder whether that haunting doubt and self-censure, which perhaps gave an additional sting to her sorrow in the case of Blæsilla, may not have overwhelmed her heart again though on a contrary ground – the doubt whether perhaps the austerities she enjoined and shared had been fatal to one, the contradictory doubt whether to leave them to the usual course of life might not have been fatal to the others. Such a woman has none of the self-confidence which steels so many against fate – and, finding nothing effectual for the safety of those she loved, neither a sacred dedication nor that consent to commonplace happiness which is the ordinary ideal of a mother's duty, might well sometimes fall into despair – a

despair silently shared by many a trembling heart in all ages, which finds its best-laid plans, though opposite to each other, fall equally into downfall and dismay.

But she had her compensations. She had her little glory, too, in the books which went forth from that seclusion in Bethlehem, bearing her name, inscribed to her and her child by the greatest writer of the time. "You, Paula and Eustochium, who have studied so deeply the books of the Hebrews, take it, this book of Esther, and test it word by word; you can tell whether anything is added, anything withdrawn: and can bear faithful witness whether I have rendered aright in Latin this Hebrew history." Few women would despise such a tribute, and fewer still the place of these two women in the Paradise of that laborious study, and at the doors of that beautiful Hospice on the Jerusalem road, where Joseph and Mary had they but come again would have run no risk of finding room!

They died all three, one after another, and were laid to rest in the pure and wholesome rock near the sacred spot of the Nativity. There is a touching story told of how Eustochium, after her mother's death, when Jerome was overwhelmed with grief and unable to return to any of his former occupations, came to him with the book of Ruth still untranslated in her hand, at once a promise and an entreaty. "Where thou goest I will go. Where thou dwellest I will dwell" – and a continuation at the same time of the blessed work which kept their souls alive.

CHAPTER VI.
THE MOTHER HOUSE

Amid all these changes the house on the Aventine – the mother house as it would be called in modern parlance – went on in busy quiet, no longer visible in that fierce light which beats upon the path of such a man as Jerome, doing its quiet work steadily, having a hand in many things, most of them beneficent, which went on in Rome. Albina the mother of Marcella, and Asella her elder sister, died in peace: and younger souls, with more stirring episodes of life, disturbed and enlivened the peace of the cloister, which yet was no cloister but open to all the influences of life, maintaining a large correspondence and much and varied intercourse with the society of the times. In the first fervour of the settlement in Bethlehem both Paula and Jerome (she by his hand) wrote to Marcella urging her to join them, to forsake the world in a manner more complete than she had yet done. "… You were the first to kindle the fire in us" (the letter is nominally from Paula and Eustochium): "the first by precept and example to urge us to adopt our present life. As a hen gathers her chickens, who fear the hawk and tremble at every shadow of a bird, so did you take us under your wing. And will you now let us fly about at random with no mother near us?"

This letter is full not only of affectionate entreaties but of delightful pictures of their own retired and peaceful life. "How

shall I describe to you," the writer says, "the little cave of Christ, the hostel of Mary? Silence is more respectful than words, which are inadequate to speak its praise. There are no lines of noble colonnades, no walls decorated by the sweat of the poor and the labour of convicts, no gilded roofs to intercept the sky. Behold in this poor crevice of the earth, in a fissure of the rock, the builder of the firmament was born." She goes on with touching eloquence to put forth every argument to move her friend.

> Read the Apocalypse of St. John and see there what he says of the woman clothed in scarlet, on whose forehead is written blasphemy, and of her seven hills, and many waters, and the end of Babylon. "Come out of her, my people," the Lord says, "that ye be not partakers of her sins." There is indeed there a holy Church; there are the trophies of apostles and martyrs, the true confession of Christ, the faith preached by the apostles, and heathendom trampled under foot, and the name of Christian every day raising itself on high. But its ambition, its power, the greatness of the city, the need of seeing and being seen, of greeting and being greeted, of praising and detracting, hearing or talking, of seeing, even against one's will, all the crowds of the world – these things are alien to the monastic profession and they have spoiled Rome, they all oppose an insurmountable obstacle to the quiet of the true monk. People visit you: if you open your doors, farewell to silence: if you close them, you are proud and unfriendly. If you return their politeness, it is through proud portals, through a host of grumbling insolent lackeys. But in the cottage of Christ all

is simple, all is rustic: except the Psalms, all is silence: no frivolous talk disturbs you, the ploughman sings Allelujah as he follows his plough, the reaper covered with sweat refreshes himself with chanting a psalm, and it is David who supplies with a song the vine dresser among his vineyards. These are the songs of the country, its ditties of love, played upon the shepherd's flute. Will the time never come when a breathless courier will bring us the good news, your Marcella has landed in Palestine? What a cry of joy among the choirs of the monks, among all the bands of the virgins! In our excitement we wait for no carriage but go on foot to meet you, to clasp your hand, to look upon your face. When will the day come when we shall enter together the birthplace of Christ: when, leaning over the divine sepulchre, we weep with a sister, a mother, when our lips touch together the sacred wood of the Cross: when on the Mount of Olives our hearts and souls rise together in the rising of our Lord? Would not you see Lazarus coming out of his tomb, bound in his shroud? and the waters of Jordan purified for the washing of the Lord? Then we shall hasten to the shepherds' folds, and pray at the tomb of David. Listen, it is the prophet Amos blowing his shepherd's horn from the height of his rock; we shall see the monuments of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the three famous women, and Samaria and Nazareth, the flower of Galilee, and Shiloh and Bethel and other holy places, accompanied by Christ, where churches rise everywhere like standards of the victories of Christ. And when we return to our cavern we will sing together always, and sometimes

> we shall weep; our hearts wounded with the arrow of the Lord, we will say one to another, "I have found Him whom my soul loveth; I will hold Him, and will not let Him go!"

Similar words upon the happiness of rural life and retirement Jerome had addressed to Marcella before. He had warned her of the danger of the tumultuous sea of life, and how the frail bark, beaten by the waves, ought to seek the shelter of the port before the last hurricane breaks. The image was even more true than he imagined; but it was not of the perils of Rome in the dreadful time of war and siege which was approaching that he spoke, but of the usual dangers of common life to the piety of the recluse. "The port which we offer you, it is the solitude of the fields," he says:

> Brown bread, herbs watered by our own hands, and milk, the daintiest of the country, supply our rustic feasts. We have no fear of drowsiness in prayer or heaviness in our readings, on such fare. In summer we seek the shade of our trees; in autumn the mild weather and pure air invite us to rest on a bed of fallen leaves; in spring, when the fields are painted with flowers, we sing our psalms among the birds. When winter comes, with its chills and snows, the wood of the nearest forest supplies our fire. Let Rome keep her tumults, her cruel arena, her mad circus, her luxurious theatres; let the senate of matrons pay its daily visits. It is good for us to cleave to the Lord and to put all our hope in Him.

But Marcella turned a deaf ear to these entreaties. Perhaps

she still loved the senate of matrons, the meetings of the Souls, the irruption of gentle visitors, the murmur of all the stories of Rome, and the delicate difficulties of marriage and re-marriage brought to her for advice and guidance. The allusions in both these letters point to such a conclusion, and there is no reason why it should not have been so. The Superior of a convent has in this fashion in much later days fulfilled more important uses than the gentle nun of the fields. At all events this lady remained in her home, her natural place, and continued to pour forth her bounty upon the poor of her native city: which many would agree was perhaps the better, though it certainly was not the safer, way. The death of her mother, which made a change in her life, and might have justified a still greater breaking up of all old customs and ties, was perhaps the occasion of these affectionate arguments; but Marcella would herself be no longer young and in a position much resembling that of a mother in her own person, the trusted friend of many in Rome, and their closest tie to a more spiritual and better life. The light of such a guest as Jerome, attracting all eyes to the house and bringing it within the records of literary history, that sole mode of saving the daily life of a household from oblivion – had indeed died away, leaving life perhaps a little flat and blank, certainly much less agitated and visible to the outer world than when he was pouring forth fire and flame upon every adversary from within the shelter of its peaceful walls. But no other change had happened in the circumstances under which Marcella opened her palace to a few consecrated sisters,

and made it a general oratory and place of pious counsel and retreat for the ladies of Rome. The same devout readings, the same singing of psalms (sometimes in the original), the same life of mingled piety and intellectualism must have gone on as before: and other fine ladies perhaps not less interesting than Paula must have sought with their confessions and confidences the ear of the experienced woman, who as Paula says in respect to herself and her daughters, "first carried the sparkle of light to our hearts, and collected us like chickens under your wing." She was the same, "our gentle, our sweet Marcella, sweeter than honey," open to every charity and kindness: not refusing, it would seem, to visit as well as to be visited, and willing to "live the life" without forsaking any ordinary bonds or traditions of existence. There is less to tell of her for this reason, but not perhaps less to praise.

Marcella had her share no doubt in forming the minds of the two younger spirits, vowed from their cradle to the perfect life of virginhood, the second Paula, daughter of Toxotius and his Christian wife; and the younger Melania, daughter also of the son whom his mother had abandoned as an infant. It is a curious answer to the stern virtue which reproaches these two Roman ladies with the cruel desertion of their children, to find that both those children, grown men, permitted or encouraged the vocation of their daughters, and were proud of the saintly renown of the mothers who had left them to their fate. The consecrated daughters however leave only a faint trace as of two spotless catechumens in the story. Incidents of a more exciting character

broke now and then the calm of life in the palace on the Aventine. M. Thierry in his life of Jerome gives us perhaps a sketch too entertaining of Fabiola, one of the ladies more or less associated with the house of Marcella, a constant visitor, a penitent by times, an enthusiast in charity, a woman bent on making, or so it seemed, the best of both worlds. She had made early what for want of a better expression we may call a love match, in which she had been bitterly disappointed. That a divorce should follow was both natural and lawful in the opinion of the time, and Fabiola had already formed a new attachment and made haste to marry again. But the second marriage was a disappointment even greater than the first, and this repeated failure seems to have confused and excited her mind to issues by no means clear at first, probably even to herself. She made in the distraction of her life a sudden and unannounced visit to Paula's convent at Bethlehem, where she was a welcome and delightful visitor, carrying with her all the personal news that cannot be put into writing, and the gracious ways of an accomplished woman of the world. She is supposed to have had a private object of her own under this visit of friendship, but the atmosphere and occupations of the place must have overawed Fabiola, and though her object was hidden in an artful web of fiction she was not bold enough to reveal it, either to the stern Jerome or the mild Paula. What she did was to make herself delightful to both in the little society upon which we have so many side-lights, and which doubtless, though so laborious and full of privations, was a very delightful society, none better,

with such a man as Jerome, full of intellectual power, and human experience, at its head, and ladies of the highest breeding like Paula and her daughter to regulate its simple habits. We are told of one pretty scene where – amid the talk which no doubt ran upon the happiness of that peaceful life amid the pleasant fields where the favoured shepherds heard the angels' song – there suddenly rose the voice of the new-comer reciting with the most enchanting flattery a certain famous letter which Jerome long before had written to his friend Heliodorus and which had been read in all the convents and passed from hand to hand as a *chef d'œuvre* of literary beauty and sacred enthusiasm. Fabiola, quick and adroit and emotional, had learned it by heart, and Jerome would have been more than man had he not felt the charm of such flattery.

For a moment the susceptible Roman seems to have felt that she had attained the haven of peace after her disturbed and agitated life. Her hand was full and her heart generous: she spread her charities far and wide among poor pilgrims and poor residents with that undoubting liberality which considered almsgiving as one of the first of Christian duties. But whether the little busy society palled after a time, or whether it was the great scare of the rumour that the Huns were coming that frightened Fabiola, we cannot tell, nor precisely how long her stay was. Her coming and going were at least within the space of two years. She was not made to settle down to the revision of manuscripts like her friends, though she had dipped like them into Hebrew

and had a pretty show of knowledge. She would seem to have evidenced this however more by curious and somewhat frivolous questions than by any assistance given in the work which was going on. Nothing could be more kind, more paternal, than Jerome to the little band of women round him. He complains, it is true, that Fabiola sometimes propounded problems and did not wait for an answer, and that occasionally he had to reply that he did not know, when she puzzled him with this rapid stream of inquiry. But it is evident also that he did his best sincerely to satisfy her curiosity as if it had been the sincerest thing in the world. For instance, she was seized with a desire to know the symbolical meaning of the costume of the high priest among the Jews: and to gratify this desire Jerome occupied a whole night in dictating to one of his scribes a little treatise on the subject, which probably the fine lady scarcely took time to read. Nothing can be more characteristic than the indications of this bright and charming visitor, throwing out reflections of all that was going on round her, so brilliant that they seemed better than the reality, fluttering upon the surface of their lives, bringing all under her spell.

There seems but little ground however for the supposition of M. Thierry that it was in the interest of Fabiola that Amandus, a priest in Rome, wrote a letter laying before Jerome a case of conscience, that of a woman who had divorced her husband and married again, and who now was troubled in her mind as to her duty; whether the second husband was wholly unlawful, and

whether she could remain in full communion with the Church, having made this marriage? If she was the person referred to no one has been able to divulge what the question meant – whether she had a third marriage in her mind, or if a wholly unnecessary fit of compunction had seized her; for as a matter of fact she had never been subjected by the Church to any pains or penalties in consequence of her second marriage. Jerome however, as might have been expected of him, gave forth no uncertain sound in his reply. According to the Church, he said, there could be but one husband, the first. Whatever had been his unworthiness, to replace him by another was to live in sin. Whether it was this answer which decided her action, or whether she had been moved by the powerful fellowship of Bethlehem to renounce the more agitating course of worldly life, at least it is certain that Fabiola's career was changed from this time. Perhaps it was her desire to shake off the second husband which moved her. At all events on her return to Rome she announced to the bishop that she felt herself guilty of a great sin, and that she desired to make public penance for the same.

Accordingly on the eve of Easter, when the penitents assembled under the porch of the great Church of St. John Lateran, amid all the wild and haggard figures appearing there, murderers and criminals of all kinds, the delicate Fabiola, with her hair hanging about her shoulders, ashes on her head and on the dark robe that covered her, her face pale with fasting and tears, stood among them, a sight for the world. Under many

aspects had all Rome seen this daughter of the great Fabian race, in the splendour of her worldly espousals, and at all the great spectacles and entertainments of a city given up to display and amusement. Her jewels, her splendid dresses, her fine equipages, were well known. With what curiosity would all her old admirers, her rivals in splendour, those who had envied her luxury and high place, gather to see her now in her voluntary humiliation, descending to the level of the very lowest as she had hitherto been on the very highest apex of society! All Rome we are told was there, gazing, wondering, tracing her movements under the portico, among these unaccustomed companions. Perhaps there might be a supreme fantastic satisfaction to the penitent – with that craving for sensation which the exhaustion of all kinds of triumphs and pleasures brings – in thus stepping from one extreme to the other, a gratification in the thought that Rome which had worshipped her beauty and splendour was now gazing aghast at her bare feet and dishevelled hair. One can have no doubt of the sensation experienced by the *Tota urbe spectante Romana*. It was worth while frequenting religious ceremonies when such a sight was possible! Fabiola, – once with mincing steps, and gorgeous liveried servants on either hand, descending languidly the great marble steps from her palace to the gilded carriage in which she sank fatigued when that brief course was over, the mitella blazing with gold upon her head, her robe woven with all the tints of the rainbow into metallic splendour of gold and silver threads. And now to see her amid that crowd

of ruffians from the Campagna, and unhappy women from the purlieus of the city, her splendid head uncovered, her thin hands crossed in the rough sleeves of the penitent's gown! It might be to some perhaps a salutary sight – moving other great ladies with heavier sins on their heads than Fabiola's to feel the prickings of remorse; though no doubt it is equally possible that they might think they saw through her, and the new form of self-exhibition which attracted all the world to gaze. We are not told whether Fabiola found refuge in the house on the Aventine with Marcella, who had lit the fire of Christian faith in her heart as well as in that of Paula: or whether she remained, like Marcella, in her own house, making it another centre of good works. But at all events her life from this moment was entirely given up to charity and spiritual things. Her kinsfolk and noble neighbours still more or less Pagan, were filled with fury and indignation and that sharp disgust at the loss of so much good money to the world, which had so much to do in embittering opposition: but the Christians were deeply impressed, the homage of such a great lady to the faith, and her recantation of her errors affecting many as a true martyrdom.

If it was really compunction for the sin of the second marriage which so moved her, her position would much resemble that of the *fine fleur* of French society as at present constituted, in its tremendous opposition to the law of divorce, now lawful in France of the nineteenth century as it was in Rome of the fourth – but resisted with a splendid bigotry of feeling, altogether

independent of morality or even of reason, by all that is noblest in the country. Fabiola's divorce had been perfectly lawful and according to all the teaching and traditions of her time. The Church had as yet uplifted no voice against it. She had not been shut out from the society even of the most pious, or condemned to any penance or deprivation. Not even Jerome (till forced to give a categorical answer), nor that purest circle of devout women at Bethlehem, had refused her any privilege. Her action was unique and unprecedented as a protest against the existing law of the land, as well as universal custom and tradition. We are not informed whether it had any lasting effect, or formed a precedent for other women. No doubt it encouraged the formation of the laws against divorce which originated in the Church itself but have held through the intervening ages a doubtful sway, broken on every side by Papal dispensations, until now that they have settled down into a bond of iron on the consciences of the devout – chiefly the women, more specially still the gentlewomen – of Catholic Europe, where as in Fabiola's time they are once more against the law of the land.

The unworthy second husband we are informed had died even before Fabiola's public act of penitence; but no further movements towards the world, or the commoner ways of life reveal themselves in her future career. If she returned to life with the veiled head and bare feet of her penitence, or if she resumed, like Marcella, much of the ordinary traffic of society, we have no information. But she was the founder of the first public hospital

in Rome, besides the usual monasteries, and built in concert with Pammachius a hospice at Ostia at the mouth of the Tiber, where strangers and travellers from all parts of the world were received, probably on the model of that hospice for pilgrims which Paula had established. And she was herself the foremost nurse in her own hospital, shrinking from no office of charity. The Church has always and in all circumstances encouraged such practical acts of self-devotion.

The ladies of the Aventine and all the friends of Jerome had been disturbed a little before by the arrival of a stranger in Rome, also a pretended friend of Jerome, and at first very willing to shelter himself under that title, Rufinus, who brought with him – after a moment of delusive amiability during which he had almost deceived the very elect themselves – a blast of those wild gales of polemical warfare which had been echoing for some time with sacrilegious force and inappropriateness from the Mount of Olives itself. The excitement which he raised in Rome in respect to the doctrines of Origen caused much commotion in the community, which lived as much by news of the Church and reports of all that was going on in theology as by the daily bread of their charities and kindness. It was to Marcella that Jerome wrote, when, reports having been made to him of all that had happened, he exploded, with the flaming bomb of his furious rhetoric, the fictitious statements of Rufinus, by which he was made to appear a supporter of Origen. Into that hot and fierce controversy we have no need to enter. No one can study the life

of Jerome without becoming acquainted with this episode and finding out how much the wrath of a Father of the Church is like the rage of other men, if not more violent; but happily as Rome was not the birthplace of this fierce quarrel it is quite immaterial to our subject or story. It filled the house of Marcella with trouble and doubt for a time, with indignation afterwards when the facts of the controversy were better known; but interesting as it must have been to the eager theologians there, filling their halls with endless discussions and alarms, lest this new agitation should interfere with the repose of their friend, it is no longer interesting except to the student now. Rufinus was finally unmasked, and condemned by the Bishop of Rome, chiefly by the exertions of Marcella, whom Oceanus, coming hot from the scene of the controversy, and Paulinian the brother of Jerome, had instructed in his true character. Events were many at this moment in that little Christian society. The tumult of controversy thus excited and all the heat and passion it brought with it had scarcely blown aside, when the ears of the Roman world were made to tingle with the wonderful story of Fabiola, and the crowd flew to behold in the portico of the Lateran her strange appearance as a penitent; and the commotion of that event had scarcely subsided when another wonderful incident appears in the contemporary history filling the house with lamentation and woe.

The young Paulina, dear on all accounts to the ladies of the Aventine as her mother's daughter, and as her husband's wife (for Pammachius, the friend and schoolfellow of Jerome, was one of

the fast friends and counsellors of the community), as well as for her own virtues, died in the flower of life and happiness, a rich and noble young matron exhibiting in her own home and amid the common duties of existence, all the noblest principles of the Christian faith. She had not chosen what these consecrated women considered as the better way: but in her own method, and amid a world lying in wickedness, had unfolded that white flower of a blameless life which even monks and nuns were thankful to acknowledge as capable of existing here and there in the midst of worldly splendours and occupations. She left no children behind her, so that her husband Pammachius was free of the anxieties and troubles, as well as of the joy and pride, of a family to regulate and provide for. His young wife left to him all her property on condition that it should be distributed among the poor, and when he had fulfilled this bequest the sorrowful husband himself retired from life, and entered a convent, in obedience to the strong impulse which swayed so many. Before this occurred however "all Rome" was roused by another great spectacle. The entire city was invited to the funeral of Paulina as if it had been to her marriage, though those who came were not the same wondering circles who crowded round the Lateran gate to see Fabiola in her humiliation. It was the poor of Rome who were called by sound of trumpet in every street, to assemble around the great Church of St. Peter, where were those tombs of the Apostles which every Christian visited as the most sacred of shrines, and where Paulina was laid forth upon her bier, the

mistress of the feast. The custom was an old one, and chambers for these funeral repasts were attached to the great catacombs and all places of burial. The funeral feast of Paulina however meant more than ordinary celebrations of the kind, as the place in which it was held was more impressive and imposing than an ordinary sepulchre however splendid. She must have been carried through the streets in solemn procession, from the heights on which stood the palaces of her ancient race, across the bridge, and by the tomb of Hadrian to that great basilica where the Apostles lay, her husband and his friends following the bier: and in all likelihood Marcella and her train were also there, replacing the distant mother. St. Peter's it is unnecessary to say was not the St. Peter's we know; but it was even then a great basilica, with wide extending porticoes and squares, and lofty roof, though the building was scarcely quite detached from the rock out of which the back part of the cathedral had been hewn.

Many strange sights have been seen in that spot which once was the centre of the civilised world, and this which seems to us one of the strangest was in no way unusual or against the traditions of the age in which it occurred. The church itself, and all its surroundings, nave and aisles and porticoes, and the square beyond, were filled with tables, and to these from all the four quarters of Rome, from the circus and the benches of the Colosseum, where the wretched slept and lurked, from the sunny pavements, and all the dens and haunts of the poor by the side of the Tiber, the crowds poured, in those unconceivable

yet picturesque rags which clothe the wretchedness of the South. They were ushered solemnly to their seats, the awe of the place, let us hope, quieting the voices of a profane and degraded populace, and overpowering the whispering, rustling, many-coloured multitude. Outside the later comers would be more unrestrained, and the roar, even though subdued, of thronging humanity must have come in strangely to the silence of the great church, and of the mourners, bent upon doing Paulina honour in this curious way. Did she lie there uplifted on her high bier to receive her guests? Or was the heart-broken Pammachius the host, standing pale upon the steps, over the grave of the Apostles? When they were "saturated" with food and wine, the first assembly left their places and were succeeded by another, each as he went away receiving from the hands of Pammachius himself a sum of money and a new garment. "Happy giver, unwearied distributor!" says the record. The livelong day this process went on; a winter day in Rome, not always warm, not always genial, very cold outside in the square under the evening breeze, and no doubt growing more and more noisy as one band continued to succeed another, and the first fed lingered about comparing their gifts, and hoping perhaps for some remnants to be collected at the end from the abundant and oft-renewed meal. There were no doubts in anybody's mind, as we have said, about encouraging pauperism or demoralising the recipients of these gifts; perhaps it would have been difficult to demoralise further that mendicant crowd. But one cannot help wondering how the

peace was kept, whether there were soldiers or some manner of classical police about to keep order, or if the disgusted Senators would have to bestir themselves to prevent this wild Christian carnival of sorrow and charity from becoming a danger to the public peace.

We are told that it was the sale of Paulina's jewels, and her splendid toilettes which provided the cost of this extraordinary funeral feast. "The beautiful dresses woven with threads of gold were turned into warm robes of wool to cover the naked; the gems that adorned her neck and her hair filled the hungry with good things." Poor Paulina! She had worn her finery very modestly according to all reports; it had served no purposes of coquetry. The reader feels that something more congenial than that coarse and noisy crowd filling the church with its deformities and loathsomeness might have celebrated her burial. But not so was the feeling of the time; that they were more miserable than words could say, vile, noisome, and unclean, formed their claim of right to all these gifts – a claim from which their noisy and rude profanity, their hoarse blasphemy and ingratitude took nothing away. Charity was more robust in the early centuries than in our fastidious days. "If such had been all the feasts spread for thee by thy Senators," cried Bishop Paulinus, the historian of this episode, "oh Rome thou might'st have escaped the evils denounced against thee in the Apocalypse." We must remember that whatever might have been the opinion later, there was no doubt in any Christian mind in the fourth century that Rome

was the Scarlet Woman of the Revelation of St. John, and that a dreadful fate was to overwhelm her luxury and pride.

Pammachius, when he had fulfilled the wishes of his wife in this way, thrilling the hearts of the mourning mother and sister in Bethlehem with sad gratification, and edifying the anxious spectators on the Aventine, carried out her will to its final end by becoming a monk, but with the curious mixture of devotion and independence common at the time, retired to no cloister, but lived in his own house, fulfilling his duties, and appearing even in the Senate in the gown and cowl so unlike the splendid garb of the day. He was no doubt one of the members for the poor in that august but scarcely active assembly, and occupied henceforward all his leisure in works of charity and religious organisations, in building religious houses, and protecting Christians in every necessity of life.

We have said that Rome in these days was as freely identified with the Scarlet Woman of the Apocalypse as ever was done by any Reformer or Puritan in later times. To Jerome she was as much Babylon, and as damnable and guilty in every way as if he had been an Orangeman or Covenanter. Mildness was not general either in speech or thought: it has seldom been so perhaps in religious controversy. It is curious indeed to mark how, so near the fount of Christianity, the Church had already come to rend itself with questions of doctrine, and expend on discussions of philosophical subtlety the force that was wanted for the moral advantage of the world. But that no doubt was one

of the defects of the great principle of self-devotion which aimed at emptying the mind of everything worldly and practical, and fixing it entirely upon spiritual subjects, thus substituting them for the ruder obstacles which occupied in common life the ruder forces of nature.

All things however were now moving swiftly towards one of the great catastrophes of the ages. Though Christianity was young, the entire system of the world's government was old and drawing towards its fall. Rome was dead, or virtually so, and all the old prestige, the old pride and pretension of her race, were perishing miserably in those last vulgarities of luxury and display which were all that was left to her. It is no doubt true that the crumbling of all common ties which took place within her bosom, under the invasion of the monkish missionaries from the East, and the influence of Athanasius, Jerome, and others – had been for some time undermining her unity, and that the rent between that portion of the aristocracy of Rome which still held by the crumbling system of Paganism, and those who had adopted the new faith, was now complete. Rome which had been the seat of empire, the centre from which law and power had gone out over all the earth, the very impersonation of the highest forces of humanity, the pride of life, the eminence of family and blood – now saw her highest names subjected voluntarily to strange new laws of humiliation, whole households trooping silently away in the garb of servants to the desert somewhere, to the Holy Land on pilgrimages, or living a life of hardship and privation

and detachment from all public interests, in the very palaces which had once been the seats of authority. Her patricians moved silent about the streets in the rude sandals and mean robes of the monk: her great ladies drove forth no longer resplendent as Venus on her car, but stood like penitent Magdalenes upon the steps of a church; and bridegroom and bride no longer linked with flowery garlands, but with the knotted cord of monastic rule, lived like vestals side by side. What was to come to a society so broken up and undermined, knowing no salvation save in its own complete undoing, preparing unconsciously for some convulsion at hand? The interpreter of the dark sayings of prophecy goes on through one lingering age after another, holding the threats of divine justice as still and always unfulfilled, and will never be content that it is any other than the present economy which is marked with the curse and threatened with the ruin of Apocalyptic denunciations. But no one could doubt that the wine was red in that cup of the wrath of God which the city of so many sins held in her hand. The voice that called "Come out of her, my people," had rung aloud in tones unmistakable, calling the best of her sons and daughters from her side; her natural weapons had fallen from her nerveless hands; she had no longer any heart even to defend herself, she who had once but to lift her hand and the air had tingled to the very boundaries of the known world as if a blazing sword had been drawn. It requires but little imagination to appropriate to the condition of Rome on the eve of the invasion of Alaric every strophe of the magnificent ode

in the eighteenth chapter of Revelation. There are reminiscences in that great poem of another, of the rousing of Hell to meet the king of the former Babylon echoing out of the mists of antiquity from the lips of the Hebrew prophet. Once more that cry was in the air – once more the thrill of approaching destruction was like the quiver of heat in the great atmosphere of celestial blue which encircled the white roofs, the shining temples, the old forums as yet untouched, and the new basilicas as yet scarce completed, of Rome. The old order was about to change finally, giving place to the new.

All becomes confused in the velocity and precipitation of descending ruin. We can trace the last hours of Paula dying safe and quiet in her retreat at Bethlehem, and even of the less gentle Melania; but when we attempt to follow the course of the events which overwhelmed the home of early faith on the Aventine, the confusion of storm and sack and horrible sufferings and terror fills the air with blackness. For years there had existed a constant succession of danger and reprieve, of threatening hosts (the so-called friends not much better than the enemies) around the walls of the doomed city, great figures of conquerors with their armies coming and going, now the barbarian, now the Roman general upon the height of the wave of battle, the city escaping by a hair's breadth, then plunged into terror again. And Marcella's house had suffered with the rest. No doubt much of the gaiety, the delightful intellectualism of that pleasant refuge, had departed with the altering time. Age had

subdued the liveliness and brightness of a community still full of the correspondences, the much letter-writing which women love. Marcella's companions had died away from her side; life was more quickly exhausted in these days of agitation, and she herself, the young and brilliant founder of that community of Souls, must have been sixty or more when the terrible Alaric, a scourge of God like his predecessor Attila, approached Rome. What had become of the rest we are not told, or if the relics of the community, nameless in their age and lessened importance, were still there: the only one that is mentioned is a young sister called Principia, her adopted child and attendant. Nothing can be more likely than that the remainder of the community had fled, seeking safety, or more likely an unknown death, in less conspicuous quarters of the city than the great palace of the Aventine with its patrician air of wealth and possible treasure. In that great house, so far as appears, remained only its mistress, her soul wound up for any martyrdom, and the girl who clung to her. If they dared to look forth at all from the marble terrace where so often they must have gazed over Rome shining white in the sunshine in all her measured lines and great proportions, her columns and her domes, what a dread scene must have met their eyes, clouds of smoke and wild gleams of flame, and the roar of outcry and slaughter mounting up into the air, soiling the very sky. There the greatest ladies of Rome had come in their grandeur to enjoy the piquant contrast and the still more piquant talk, the philosophies which they loved to penetrate and understand, the

learning which went over their heads. There Jerome, surrounded with soft flatteries and provocations, had talked his best, giving forth out of his stores the tales of wonder he had brought from Eastern cells and caves and all the knowledge of the schools, to dazzle the amateurs of the Roman gynæceum. What gay, what thrilling, what happy memories! – mingled with the sweetness of remembrance of gentle Paula who was dead, of Asella dead, of Fabiola in all her fascinations and caprices, dead too so far as appears – and no doubt in those thirty years since first Marcella opened her house to the special service of God, many more; till now that she was left alone, grey-headed, on that height whither the fierce Goths were coming, raging, flashing round them fire and flame, with the girl who would not leave her, the young maiden in her voiceless meekness whom we see only at this awful moment, she who might have a sharper agony than death before her, the most appalling of martyrdoms.

One final triumph however remained for Marcella. By what wonderful means we know not, by her prayers and tears, by supplication on her knees, to the rude Goths who after their sort were Christians, and sometimes spared the helpless victims and sometimes listened to a woman's prayer, she succeeded in saving her young companion from outrage, and in dragging her somehow to the shelter of the nearest church, where they were safe. But she was herself in her age and weakness, tortured, flogged, and treated with the utmost cruelty, that she might disclose the hiding-place in which she had put her treasure. The

treasure of the house of the Aventine was not there: it had fed the poor, and supplied the wants of the sick in all the most miserable corners of Rome. The kicks and blows of the baffled plunderers could not bring that long-expended gold and silver together again. But these sufferings were as nothing in comparison to the holy triumph of saving young Principia, which was the last and not the least wonderful work of her life. The very soldiers who had struck and beaten the mistress of the desolate house were overcome by her patience and valour, "Christ softened their hard hearts," says Jerome. "The barbarians conveyed both you and her to the basilica that you might find a place of safety or at least a tomb." Nothing can be more extraordinary in the midst of this awful scene of carnage and rapine than to know that the churches were sanctuaries upon which the rudest assailants dared not to lift a hand, and that the helpless women, half dead of fright and one of them bleeding and wounded with the cruel treatment she had received, were safe as soon as they had been dragged over the sacred threshold.

The church in which Marcella and her young companion found shelter was the great basilica of St. Paul *fuori le mura*, beyond the Ostian gate. They were conducted there by their captors themselves, some compassionate Gaul or Frank, whose rude chivalry of soul had been touched by the spectacle of the aged lady's struggle for her child. What a terrible flight through the darkness must that have been "in the lost battle borne down by the flying" amid the trains of trembling fugitives all bent on

that one spot of safety, the gloom lighted up by the gleams of the burning city behind, the air full of shrieks and cries of the helpless, the Tiber rushing swift and strong by the path to swallow any helpless wayfarer pushed aside by stronger fugitives. The two ladies reached half-dead the great church on the edge of the Campagna, the last refuge of the miserable, into which were crowded the wrecks of Roman society, both Pagan and Christian, patrician and slave, hustled together in the equality of doom. A few days after, in the church itself, or some of its dependencies, Marcella died. Her palace in ruins, her companions dead or fled, she perished along with the old Rome against whose vices she had protested, but which she had loved and would not abandon: whose poor she had fed with her substance, whose society she had attempted to purify, and in which she had led so honourable and noble – may we not also believe amid all her austerities, in the brown gown which was almost a scandal, and the meagre meals that scarcely kept body and soul together? – so happy a life. There is no trace now of the noble mansion which she devoted to so high a purpose, and few of the many pilgrims who love to discover all that is interesting in the relics of Rome, have even heard the name of Marcella – "Illam mitem, illam suavem, illam omni melle et dulcedine dulciorem" – whose example "lured to higher worlds and led the way." But her pleasant memory lingers on the leafy crest of the Aventine where she lived, and where the church of Sta. Sabina now stands: and her mild shadow lies on that great church outside the gates, often destroyed, often

restored, the shrine of Paul the Apostle, where, wounded and broken, but always faithful to her trust, she died. The history of the first dedicated household, the first convent, the *ecclesia domestica*, which was so bright a centre of life in the old Rome, not yet entirely Christian, is thus rounded into a perfect record. It began in 380 or thereabouts, it ended in 410. Its story is but an obscure chapter in the troubled chronicles of the time; but there is none more spotless, and scarcely any so serenely radiant and bright.

Pammachius also died in the siege, whether among the defenders of the city or in the general carnage is not known, "with many other brothers and sisters whose death is announced to us" Jerome says, whom that dreadful news threw into a stupor of horror and misery, so that it was some time before he could understand the details or discover who was saved and who lost. The saved indeed were very few, and the losses many. Young Paula, the granddaughter of the first, the child of Toxotius, who also was happily dead before these horrors, had been for some years in Bethlehem peacefully learning how to take the elder Paula's place, and shedding sweetness into the life of the old prophet in his rocky chamber at Bethlehem, and of the grave Eustochium in her convent. Young Melania, standing in the same relationship to the heroine of that name, whose fame is less sweet, was out of harm's way too. They and many humbler members of the community had escaped by flight, among the agitated crowds which had long been pouring out of Italy towards the

East, some from mere panic, some by the vows of self-dedication and retirement from the world. Many more as has been seen escaped in Rome itself, before its agony began, by the still more effectual way of death. Only Marcella, the first of all, the pupil of Athanasius, the mother and mistress of so many consecrated souls, fell on the outraged threshold of her own house, over which she had come and gone for thirty years, with those feet that are beautiful on the mountains, the feet of those who bring good tidings, and carry charity and loving kindness to every door.

BOOK II.
THE POPES WHO MADE THE PAPACY

CHAPTER I.
GREGORY THE GREAT

When Rome had fallen into the last depths of decadence, luxury, weakness, and vice, the time of fierce and fiery trial came. The great city lay like a helpless woman at the mercy of her foes – or rather at the mercy of every new invader who chose to sack her palaces and throw down her walls, without even the pretext of any quarrel against the too wealthy and luxurious city, which had been for her last period at least nobody's enemy but her own. Alaric, who, not content with the heaviest ransom, returned to rage through her streets with all those horrors and cruelties which no advance in civilisation has ever yet entirely dissociated from the terrible name of siege: Attila, whose fear of his predecessor's fate and the common report of murders and portents, St. Peter with a sword of flame guarding his city, and other signs calculated to melt the hearts of the very Huns in their bosoms, kept at a distance: passed by without harming the

prostrate city. But Genseric and his Vandals were kept back by no such terrors. The ancient Rome, with all her magnificent relics of the imperial age, fell into ruin and was trampled under foot by victor after victor in the fierce license of barbarous triumph. Her secret stores of treasure, her gold and silver, her magnificent robes, her treasures of art fell, like her beautiful buildings, into the rude hands which respected nothing, neither beauty nor the traditions of a glorious past. How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! All the pathetic and wonderful plaints of the Hebrew prophet over a still holier and more ancient place, trodden under foot and turned into a desert, rise to the mind during this passion and agony of imperial Rome. But the mistress of the world had no such fierce band of patriots to fight inch by inch for her holy places as had the old Jerusalem. There were few to shed their blood for her in the way of defence. The blood that flowed was that of murdered weakness, not that freely shed of valiant men.

During this terrible period of blood and outrage and passion and suffering, one institution alone stood firm amid the ruins, wringing even from the fiercest of the barbarians a certain homage, and establishing a sanctuary in the midst of sack and siege in which the miserable could find shelter. As every other public office and potency fell, the Church raised an undaunted front, and took the place at once of authority and of succour among the crushed and downtrodden people. It is common to speak of this as the beginning of that astute and politic wisdom

of Rome which made the city in the middle ages almost a greater power than in her imperial days, and equally mistress of the world. But there is very little evidence that any great plan for the aggrandisement of the Church, or the establishment of her supremacy, had yet been formed, or that the early Popes had any larger purpose in their minds than to do their best in the position in which they stood, to avert disaster, to spread Christianity, and to shield as far as was possible the people committed to their care. No formal claim of supremacy over the rest of the Church had been as yet made: it was indeed formally repudiated by the great Gregory in the end of the sixth century as an unauthorised claim, attributed to the bishops of Rome only by their enemies, though still more indignantly to be denounced when put forth by any other ecclesiastical authority such as the patriarch of Constantinople. To Peter, he says in one of his epistles, was committed the charge of the whole Church, but his successors did not on that account call themselves rulers of the Church universal – how much less a bishropic of the East who had no such glorious antecedents!

But if pretension to the primacy had not yet been put forth, there had arisen the practical situation, which called the bishops of Rome to a kind of sovereignty of the city. The officials of the empire, a distant exarch at Ravenna, a feeble prætor at Rome, had no power either to protect or to rescue. The bishop instinctively, almost involuntarily, whenever he was a man of strength or note, was put into the breach. Whatever could be done by negotiation,

he, a man of peace, was naturally called to do. Innocent procured from Alaric the exemption of the churches from attack even in the first and most terrible siege; there wounded men and flying women found refuge in the hottest of the pillage, and Marcella struggling, praying for the deliverance of her young nun, through the brutal crowd which had invaded her house, was in safety with her charge, as we have seen, as soon as they could drag themselves within the sanctuary. This was already a great thing in that dread conflict of force with weakness – and it continued to be the case more or less in all the successive waves of fire and flame which passed over Rome. And when the terrible tide of devastation was over, one patriot Pope at least took the sacred vessels of gold and silver, which had been saved along with the people in their sanctuaries, and melted them down to procure bread for the remnant, thus doubly delivering the flock committed to his care. These facts worked silently, and there seems no reason to believe other than unconsciously at first, towards the formation of the great power which was once more to make Rome a centre of empire. The historian is too apt to perceive in every action an early-formed and long-concealed project tending towards one great end; and it is common to recognise, even in the missionary expeditions of the Church, as well as in the immediate protection exercised around her seat, this astute policy and ever-maturing, ever-growing scheme. But neither Leo nor Gregory require any such explanation of their motives; their duty was to protect, to deliver, to work day and

night for the welfare of the people who had no other protectors: as it was their first duty to spread the Gospel, to teach all nations according to their Master's commission. It is hard to take from them the credit of those measures which were at once their natural duty and their delight, in order to make all their offices of mercy subservient to the establishment of a universal authority to which neither of them laid any claim.

While Rome still lay helpless in the midst of successive invasions, now in one conqueror's hands, now in another, towards the middle of the sixth century a young man of noble race – whose father and mother were both Christians, the former occupying a high official position, as was also the case with the son, in his earlier years – became remarkable among his peers according to the only fashion which a high purpose and noble meaning seems to have been able to take at that period. Perhaps such a spirit as that of Gregory could never have been belligerent; yet it is curious to note that no patriotic saviour of his country, no defender of Rome, who might have called forth a spirit in the gilded youth, and raised up the ancient Roman strength for the deliverance of the city, seems to have been possible in that age of degeneration. No Maccabæus was to be found among the ashes of the race which once had ruled the world. Whatever excellence remained in it was given to the new passion of the cloister, the instinct of sacrifice and renunciation instead of resistance and defence. It may be said that the one way led equally with the other to that power which is always dear to the heart of man: yet

it is extraordinary that amid all the glorious traditions of Rome, – notwithstanding the fame of great ancestors still hanging about every noble house, and the devotion which the city itself, then as now, excited among its children, a sentiment which has made many lesser places invulnerable, so long as there was a native arm to strike a blow for them, no single bold attempt was ever made, no individual stand, no popular frenzy of patriotism ever excited in defence of the old empress of the world. The populace perhaps was too completely degraded to make any such attempt possible, but the true hero when he appears does not calculate, and is able to carry out his glorious effort with sometimes the worst materials. However, it is needless to attempt to account for such an extraordinary failure in the very qualities which had made the Roman name illustrious. Despair must have seized upon the very heart of the race. That race itself had been vitiated and mingled with baser elements by ages of conquest, repeated captivities, and overthrows, and all the dreadful yet monotonous vicissitudes of disaster, one outrage following another, and the dreadful sense of impotence, which crushes the very being, growing with each new catastrophe. It must have appeared to the children of the ancient conquerors that there was no refuge or hope for them, save in that kingdom not of this world, which had risen while everything else crumbled under their feet, which had been growing in silence while the old economy fell into ashes, and which alone promised a resurrection and renewal worthy of the highest hopes.

This ideal had been growing throughout the world, and had

penetrated into almost every region of Christendom before the period of Gregory's birth. Nearly a hundred and fifty unhappy years had passed since Marcella ended her devout life amid the fire and flame of the first siege; but the times had so little changed that it was at first under the same aspect which attracted that Roman lady and so many of her contemporaries, that the monastic life recommended itself to the young patrician Gregorius, in the home of his parents, the Roman villa on the edge of that picturesque and splendid wood of great oak-trees which gave to the Cœlian Hill its first title of Mons Querquetulanus. It had been from the beginning of his life a devout house, full of the presence and influence of three saintly women, all afterwards canonised, his mother Silvia and his father's sisters. That father himself was at least not uncongenial to his surroundings, though living the usual life, full of magnificence and display, of the noble Roman, filling in his turn great offices in the state, or at least the name and outward pomp of offices which had once been great. Some relics of ancient temples gleaming through the trees beyond the gardens of the villa must still have existed among the once sacred groves; and the vast buildings of the old economy, the Colosseum behind, the ruined and roofless palaces of the Palatine, would be visible from the terrace on which the meditative youth wandered, pondering over Rome at his feet and the great world lying beyond, in which there were endless marchings and countermarchings of barbarous armies, one called in to resist the

other, Huns and Vandals from one quarter, irresistible Franks, alien races all given to war, while the secret and soul of peace lay in that troubled and isolated stronghold of Him whose kingdom was not of this world. Gregory musing can have had no thought, such as we should put instinctively into the mind of a noble young man in such circumstances, of dying upon the breached and crumbling walls for his country, or leading any forlorn hope; and if his fancy strayed instead far from those scenes of battle and trouble to the convent cells and silent brotherhoods, where men disgusted and sick of heart could enter and pray, it was as yet with no thought or intention of following their example. He tells us himself that he resisted as long as he could "the grace of conversion," and as a matter of fact entered into the public life such as it was, of the period, following in his father's footsteps, and was himself, like Gordianus, *prætor urbis* in his day, when he had attained the early prime of manhood. The dates of his life are dubious until we come to his later years, but it is supposed that he was born about 540; and he was recommended for the Prætorship by the Emperor Julius, which must have been before 573, at which date he would have attained the age of thirty-three, that period so significant in the life of man, the limit, as is believed, of our Lord's existence on earth, and close to that *mezzo del cammin* which the poet has celebrated as the turning-point of life. In his splendid robes, attended by his throng of servants, he must no doubt have ruffled it with the best among the officials of a state which had scarcely anything but lavish display and splendour to

justify its pretence of government; but we hear nothing either of the early piety or early profanity which generally distinguish, one or the other, the beginning of a predestined saint. Neither prodigal nor devotee, the son of Gordianus and Silvia did credit to his upbringing, even if he did not adopt its austerer habits. But when his father died, the attraction which drew so many towards the cloister must have begun to operate upon Gregory. When all the wealth came into his hands, when his devout mother retired to her nun's cell on the Aventine, close to the old basilica of S. Sabba, giving up the world, and the young man was left in full possession of his inheritance and the dwelling of his fathers, he would seem to have come to a serious pause in his life. Did he give a large slice of his fortune to endow monasteries in distant Sicily, as far out of the way, one might say, as possible, by way of compromising with his conscience, and saving himself from the sweep of the current which had begun to catch his feet? Perhaps it was some family connection with Sicily – estates, situated there as some think, which prompted the appropriation of his gifts to that distant island; but this is mere speculation, and all that the authorities tell us is that he did establish and endow six monasteries in Sicily, without giving any reason for it. This was his first step towards the life to which later all his wishes and interests were devoted.

It would seem, however, if there is any possible truth in the idea, that the Sicilian endowments were a sort of ransom for himself and the personal sacrifice of the world which his growing

fervour demanded of him, that the expedient was not a successful one. He did not resist the grace of conversion very long; but it is curious to find him, so long after, adopting the same expedient as that which had formed a middle ground for his predecessors in an earlier age, by converting his father's house into a convent. St. Benedict, the first of monastic founders in Europe, was scarcely born when Marcella first called about her the few pious maidens and widows who formed her permanent household in Rome; but by the time of Gregory, the order of Benedict had become one of the great facts and institutions of the time – and his villa was soon filled with a regular community of black-robed monks with their abbot and other leaders. Remaining in the beloved shelter of his natural home, he became a member of this community. He did not even retain, as Marcella did, the government of the new establishment in his own hand, but served humbly, holding no office, as an undistinguished brother. It was not without difficulty that he made up his mind to this step. In the letter to Leander which forms the dedication of his commentary on Job, he gives a brief and vague account of his own hesitations and doubts. The love of things eternal, he says, had taken hold upon his mind while yet custom had so wound its chains round him that he could not make up his mind to change his outward garb. But the new influence was so strong that he engaged in the service of the world as it were in semblance only, his purpose and inclination turning more and more towards the cloister. When the current of feeling and spiritual excitement carried him beyond all these

reluctances and hesitations, and he at last "sought the haven of the monastery," having, as he says, "left all that is of the world as at that time I vainly believed, I came out naked from the shipwreck of human life." His intention at this crisis was evidently not that of fitting himself for the great offices of the Church or entering what was indeed one of the greatest professions of the time, the priesthood, the one which, next to that of the soldier, was most apt for advancement. Like Jerome, Gregory's inclination was to be a monk and not a priest, and he expressly tells us that "the virtue of obedience was set against my own inclination to make me take the charge of ministering at the holy altar," which he was obliged to accept upon the ground that the Church had need of him. This disinclination to enter the priesthood is all the more remarkable that Gregory was evidently a preacher born, and seems early in his monastic life to have developed this gift. The elucidation of so difficult and mysterious a book as that of Job was asked of him by his brethren at an early period of his career.

We have no guidance of dates to enable us to know how long a time he passed in the monastery, which was dedicated to St. Andrew, after he turned it from a palace-villa into monastic cells and cloisters; but the legend which comes in more or less to every saintly life here affords us one or two delightful vignettes to illustrate the history. His mother Silvia in her nun's cell, surrounded by its little garden, at S. Sabba, sent daily, the story goes – and there is no reason to doubt its truth – a mess of

vegetables to her son upon the Cœlian, prepared by her own tender hands. One can imagine some shockheaded Roman of a lay brother, old servant or retainer, tramping alone, day by day, over the stony ways, across the deep valley between the two hills, with the simple dish tied in its napkin, which perhaps had some savour of home and childhood, the mother's provision for her boy.

Another story, less original, relates how having sold everything and given all his money to the poor, Gregory was beset by a shipwrecked sailor who came to him again and again in the cell where he sat writing, and to whom at last, having no money, he gave the only thing of value he had left, a silver dish given him by his mother – perhaps the very bowl in which day by day his dinner of herbs was sent to him. Needless to say that the mysterious sailor assumed afterwards a more glorious form, and Gregory found that he had given alms, if not as in most such cases to his Master, at least to a ministering angel. Then, too, in those quiet years arose other visionary legends, that of the dove who sat on his shoulder and breathed inspiration into his ear, and the Madonna who spoke to him as he sat musing – a Madonna painted by no mortal hands, but coming into being on the wall – a sweet and consoling vision in the light that never was by sea or shore. These are the necessary adjuncts of every saintly legend. It is not needful that we should insist upon them; but they help us to realise the aspect of the young Roman who had, at last, after some struggles attained that "grace of conversion" which makes

the renunciation of every worldly advantage possible, but who still dwelt peacefully in his own house, and occupied the cell he had chosen for himself with something of the consciousness of the master of the house, although no superiority of rank among his brethren, finding no doubt a delightful new spring of life in the composition of his homilies, and the sense that a higher sphere of work and activity was thus opening before his feet.

The cell of St. Gregory and his marble chair in which he worked and rested, are still shown for the admiration of the faithful on the right side of the church which bears his name: but neither church nor convent are of his building, though they occupy the sites consecrated by him to the service of God. "Here was the house of Gregory, converted by him into a monastery," says the inscription on the portico. And in one spot at least the steps of the Roman gentleman turned monk, may still be traced in the evening freshness and among the morning dews – in the garden, from which the neighbouring summits of the sun-crowned city still rise before the rapt spectator with all their memories and their ruins. There were greater ruins in Gregory's day, ruins still smoking from siege and fire, roofless palaces telling their stern lesson of the end of one great period of empire, of a mighty power overthrown, and new rude overwhelming forces, upon which no man could calculate, come in, in anarchy and bloodshed, to turn the world upside down. We all make our own somewhat conventional comparisons and reflections upon that striking scene, and moralise at our leisure over the Pagan

and the Christian, and all that has been signified to the world in such an overthrow and transformation. But Gregory's thoughts as he paced his garden terrace must have been very different from ours. He no doubt felt a thrill of pleasure as he looked at the desecrated places over which Goth and Vandal had raged, in the thought that the peaceful roof of his father's house was safe, a refuge for the chosen souls who had abjured the world; and self-withdrawn from all those conflicts and miseries, mused in his heart over the new world which was dawning, under the tender care of the Church and the ministration of those monks denuded of all things, whose sole inspiration was to be the love of God and the succour of the human race. The world could not go on did not every new economy form to itself some such glorious dream of the final triumph of the good, the noble, and the true. Great Rome lay wrecked and ended in the sight of the patrician monk who had schooled himself out of all the bitterness of the vanquished in that new hope and new life of the cloister. Did he already see his brethren, the messengers of the faith, going forth to all the darkest corners of the unknown world with their gospel, and new skies and new lands turning to meet the shining of the new day? – or with thoughts more profound in awe, more sacred in mysterious joy, did he hold his breath to think what all these ragings of nations and overturning of powers might portend, the glorious era when all misery should be ended, and the Lord come in the clouds to judge the earth and vindicate His people? The monks have failed like the emperors since Gregory's day – the

Popes have found no more certain solution for the problems of earth than did the philosophers. But it is perhaps more natural on one of those seven hills of Rome, to think of that last great event which shall fulfil all things, and finally unravel this mortal coil of human affairs, than it is on any other spot of earth except the mystic Mount of the Olives, from which rose the last visible steps of the Son of Man.

We have no knowledge how long this quiet life lasted, or if he was long left to write his sermons in his cell, and muse in his garden, and receive his spare meal from his mother's hands, the mess of lentils, or beans, or artichokes, which would form his only fare; but it is evident that even in this seclusion he had given assurance of a man to the authorities of the Church and was looked upon as one of its hopes. He had no desire, as has been said, to become a priest, but rather felt an almost superstitious fear of being called upon to minister at the holy altar, a sentiment very usual in those days among men of the world converted to a love of the life of prayer and penitence, but not of the sacerdotal charge or profession. It is curious indeed how little the sacramental idea had then developed in the minds of the most pious. The rule of Benedict required the performance of the mass only on Sundays and festivals, and there is scarcely any mention of the more solemn offices of worship in the age of Jerome, who was a priest in spite of himself, and never said but one mass in his life. It was to "live the life," as in the case of a recent remarkable convert from earthly occupations to mystical religionism, that

the late prætor, sick of worldly things, devoted himself: and not to enter into a new caste, against which the tradition that discredits all priesthoods and the unelevated character of many of its members, has always kept up a prejudice, which exists now as it existed then.

But Gregory could not struggle against the fiat of his ecclesiastical superiors, and was almost compelled to receive the first orders. After much toiling and sifting of evidence the ever careful Bollandists have concluded that this event happened in 578 or 579 – while Baronius, perhaps less bigoted in his accuracy, fixes it in 583. Nor was it without a distinct purpose that this step was taken; there was more to do in the world for this man than to preach homilies and expound Scripture in the little Roman churches. Some one was wanted to represent Pope Benedict the First in Constantinople, some one who knew the world and would not fear the face of any emperor; and it was evidently to enable him to hold the post of Apocrisarius or Nuncio, that Gregory was hastily invested with deacon's orders, and received the position later known as that of a Cardinal deacon. It is a little premature, and harmonises ill with the other features of the man, to describe him as a true mediæval Nuncio, with all the subtle powers and arrogant assumptions of the Rome of the middle ages. This however is Gibbon's description of him, a bold anachronism, antedating by several ages the pretensions which had by no means come to any such development in the sixth century. He describes the Apocrisarius of Pope Benedict

as one "who boldly assumed in the name of St. Peter a tone of independent dignity which would have been criminal and dangerous in the most illustrious layman of the empire."

There is little doubt that Gregory would be an original and remarkable figure among the sycophants of the imperial court, where the vices of the East mingled with those of the West, and everything was venal, corrupt, and debased. Gregory was the representative of a growing power, full of life and the prospects of a boundless future. There was neither popedom nor theories of universal primacy as yet, and he was confronted at Constantinople by ecclesiastical functionaries of as high pretensions as any he could put forth; but yet the Bishop of Rome had a unique position, and the care of the interests of the entire Western Church was not to be held otherwise than with dignity and a bold front whoever should oppose.

There was however another side to the life of the Nuncio which is worthy of note and very characteristic of the man. He had been accompanied on his mission by a little train of monks; for these cœnobites were nothing if not social, and their solitude was always tempered by the proverbial companion to whom they could say how delightful it was to be alone. This little private circle formed a home for the representative of St. Peter, to which he retired with delight from the wearisome audiences, intrigues, and ceremonies of the imperial court. Another envoy, Leander, a noble Spaniard, afterwards Bishop of Seville, and one of the favourite saints of Spain, was in Constantinople at the same time,

charged with some high mission from Rome "touching the faith of the Visigoths," whose conversion from Arianism was chiefly the work of this apostolic labourer. And he too found refuge in the home of Gregory among the friends there gathered together, probably bringing with him his own little retinue in the same Benedictine habit. "To their society I fled," says Gregory, "as to the bosom of the nearest port from the rolling swell and waves of earthly occupation; and though that office which withdrew me from the monastery had with the point of its employments stabbed to death my former tranquillity of life, yet in their society I was reanimated." They read and prayed together, keeping up the beloved punctilios of the monastic rule, the brethren with uninterrupted attention, the Nuncio and the Bishop as much as was possible to them in the intervals of their public work. And in the cool atrio of some Eastern palace, with the tinkling fountain in the midst and the marble benches round, the little company with one breath besought their superior to exercise for them those gifts of exposition and elucidation of which he had already proved himself a master. "It was then that it seemed good to those brethren, you too adding your influence as you will remember, to oblige me by the importunity of their requests to set forth the book of the blessed Job – and so far as the Truth should inspire me, to lay open to them these mysteries." We cannot but think it was a curious choice for the brethren to make in the midst of that strange glittering world of Constantinople, where the ecclesiastical news would all be of persecuting Arians and

perverse Eastern bishops, and where all kinds of subtle heresies, both doctrinal and personal, were in the air, fine hair-splitting arguments as to how much or how little of common humanity was in the sacred person of our Lord, as well as questions as to the precise day on which to keep Easter and other regulations of equal importance. But to none of these matters did the monks in exile turn their minds. "They made this too an additional burden which their petition laid upon me, that I would not only unravel the words of the history in allegorical senses, but that I would go on to give to the allegorical sense the turn of a moral exercise: with the addition of something yet harder, that I would fortify the different meanings with analogous passages, and that these, should they chance to be involved, should be disentangled by the aid of additional explanation."

This abstruse piece of work was the recreation with which his brethren supplied the active mind of Gregory in the midst of his public employments and all the distractions of the imperial court. It need not be said that he did not approach the subject critically or with any of the lights of that late learning which has so much increased the difficulty of approaching any subject with simplicity. It is not supposed even that he had any knowledge of the original, or indeed any learning at all. The Nuncio and his monks were not disturbed by questions about that wonderful scene in which Satan stands before God. They accepted it with a calm which is as little concerned by its poetic grandeur as troubled by its strange suggestions. That extraordinary revelation

of an antique world, so wonderfully removed from us, beyond all reach of history, was to them the simplest preface to a record of spiritual experience, full of instruction to themselves, lessons of patience and faith, and all the consolations of God. Nothing is more likely than that there were among the men who clustered about Gregory in his Eastern palace, some who like Job had seen everything that was dear to them perish, and had buried health and wealth and home and children under the ashes of sacked and burning Rome. We might imagine even that this was the reason why that mysterious poem with all its wonderful discoursings was chosen as the subject to be treated in so select an assembly. Few of these men if any would be peaceful sons of the cloister, bred up in the stillness of conventual life; neither is it likely that they would be scholars or divines. They were men rescued from a world more than usually terrible and destructive of individual happiness, saddened by loss, humiliated in every sensation either of family or national pride, the fallen sons of a great race, trying above all things to console themselves for the destruction of every human hope. And the exposition of Job is written with this end, with strange new glosses and interpretations from that New Testament which was not yet six hundred years old, and little account of any difference between: for were not both Holy Scripture intended for the consolation and instruction of mankind? and was not this the supreme object of all – not to raise antiquarian questions or exercise the mind on metaphysical arguments, but to gather a little balsam for the wounds, and form

a little prop for the weakness of labouring and heavily laden men? *Moralia*: "The Book of the Morals of St. Gregory the Pope" is the title of the book – a collection of lessons how to endure and suffer, how to hope and believe, how to stand fast – in the certainty of a faith that overcomes all things, in the very face of fate.

"Whosoever is speaking concerning God," says Gregory, "must be careful to search out thoroughly whatsoever furnishes moral instruction to his hearers; and should account that to be the right method of ordering his discourse which permits him when opportunity for edification requires it, to turn aside for a useful purpose from that which he had begun to speak of. He that treats of sacred writ should follow the way of a river: for if a river as it flows along its channel meets with open valleys on its side, into these it immediately turns the course of its current, and when they are copiously supplied presently it pours itself back into its bed. Thus unquestionably should it be with every one that treats the Divine word, so that if discussing any subject he chances to find at hand any occasion of seasonable edification he should as it were force the streams of discourse towards the adjacent valley, and when he has poured forth enough upon its level of instruction fall back into the channel of discourse which he had proposed to himself."

We do not know what the reader may think of Gregory's geography; but certainly he carries out his discursive views to the full, and fills every valley he may chance to come to in his

flowing, with pools and streams – no doubt waters of refreshing to the souls that surrounded him, ever eager to press him on. A commentary thus called forth by the necessities of the moment, spoken in the first place to anxious listeners who had with much pressure demanded it, and who nodded their heads over it with mingled approbation and criticism as half their own, has a distinctive character peculiar to itself, and requires little aid from science or learning. A large portion of it was written as it fell from his lips, without revision Gregory informs us, "because the brethren drawing me away to other things, would not leave time to correct this with any great degree of exactness."

A gleam of humour comes across the picture as he describes his position among this band of dependent and applauding followers, who yet were more or less the masters of his leisure and private life. "Pursuing my object of obeying their instructions, *which I must confess were sufficiently numerous*, I have completed this work," he says. The humour is a little rueful, the situation full of force and nature. The little group of lesser men would no doubt have fully acknowledged themselves inferior to the eloquent brother, their founder, their instructor, so much greater a man in every way than themselves: but yet not able to get on without the hints of Brother John or Brother Paul, helped so much by that fine suggestion of the Cellarius, and the questions and sagacious remarks of the others. The instructions of the brethren! who does not recognise the scene, the nods aside, the objections, the volunteered information and directions how

to say this or that, which he knew so much better how to say than any of them! while he sat listening all the time, attending to every criticism, taking up a hint here and there, with that curious alchemy of good humour and genius, turning the dull remarks to profit, yet always with a twinkle in his eye at those advices "sufficiently numerous" which aimed at teaching him how to teach them, a position which many an ecclesiastic and many an orator must have realised since then. Gregory reveals his consciousness of the state of affairs quite involuntarily, nothing being further from his mind than to betray to his reverend and saintly brother anything so human and faulty as a smile; and it is clear that he took the animadversions in good part with as much good nature as humour. To make out the features of the same man in Gibbon's picture of an arrogant priest assuming more than any layman durst assume, is very difficult. The historian evidently made his study from models a few hundred years further down in the record.

Gregory seems to have held the place of Apocrisarius twice under two different Popes – Benedict I. and Pelagius II.; but whether he returned to Rome between the two is not clear. One part of his commission from Pelagius was to secure help from the Emperor against the Lombards who were threatening Rome. The Pope's letter with its lamentable account of the undefended and helpless condition of the city, and the urgency with which he entreats his representative to support the pleading of a special envoy sent for that purpose, is interesting. It is sent to Gregory

by the hands of a certain Sebastian, "our brother and coadjutor," who has been in Ravenna with the general Decius, and therefore is able to describe at first hand the terrible state of affairs to the Emperor. "Such misfortunes and tribulations," says the Pope, "have been inflicted upon us by the perfidy of the Lombards contrary to their own oath as no one could describe. Therefore speak and act so as to relieve us speedily in our danger. For the state is so hemmed in, that unless God put it into the heart of our most pious prince to show pity to his servants, and to vouchsafe us a grant of money, and a commander and leader, we are left in the last extremity, all the districts round Rome being defenceless, and the Exarch unable to do anything to help us. Therefore may God persuade the Emperor to come quickly to our aid before the armies of that most accursed race have overrun our lands."

What a strange overturn of all things is apparent when such a piteous appeal is conveyed to the Eastern empire already beginning to totter, from what was once imperial and triumphant Rome!

It was in 586, four years before the end of the life of Pelagius, that Gregory returned home. The abbot of his convent, Maximianus, had been promoted to the see of Syracuse, though whether for independent reasons or to make room for Gregory in that congenial position we are not informed; and the Nuncio on his return succeeded naturally to the vacant place. If it was now or at an earlier period that he bestowed all his robes, jewels, etc., on the convent it is difficult to decide, for there seems always to

have been some reserve of gifts to come out on a later occasion, after we have heard of an apparent sacrifice of all things for the endowment of one charity or another. At all events Gregory's charities were endless and continued as long as he lived.

No retirement within the shadow of the convent was however possible now for the man who had taken so conspicuous a position in public life. He was appointed secretary to the Pope, combining that office with the duties of head of his convent, and would appear besides to have been the most popular preacher in Rome, followed from one church to another by admiring crowds, and moving the people with all the force of that religious oratory which is more powerful than any other description of eloquence: though to tell the truth we find but little trace of this irresistible force in his discourses as they have come down to us. Popular as he was he does not seem to have had any special reputation either for learning or for literary style.

One of the best known of historical anecdotes is the story of Gregory's encounter with the group of English children brought to Rome as slaves, whom he saw accidentally, as we say, in one of his walks. It belongs in all probability to this period of his life, and no doubt formed an episode in his daily progress from St. Andrew's on its hill to the palace of the Bishop of Rome which was then attached to the great church of the Lateran gate. In this early home of the head of the Roman hierarchy there would no doubt be accommodation for pilgrims and strangers, in addition to the spare court of the primitive Pope, but probably little

anticipation of the splendours of the Vatican, not yet dreamed of. Gregory was pursuing his musing way, a genial figure full of cheerful observation and interest in all around him, when he was suddenly attracted as he crossed some street or square, amid the crowd of dark heads and swarthy faces by a group, unlike the rest, of fair Saxon boys, long-limbed and slender, with their rose tints and golden locks. The great ecclesiastic appears to us here all at once in a new light, after all we have known of him among his monastic brethren. He would seem to have been one of those inveterate punsters who abound among ecclesiastics, as well as a tender-hearted man full of fatherly instincts. He stopped to look at the poor children so unlike anything he knew. Who were they? Angles. Nay, more like angels, he said in his kind tones, with no doubt a smile in return for the wondering looks suddenly raised upon him. And their country? Deiri. Ah, a happy sign! *de ira eruti*, destined to rise out of wrath into blessedness. And their king? the boys themselves might by this time be moved to answer the kind monk, who looked at them so tenderly. Ella – Alle, as it is reported in the Latin, softening the narrower vowel. And was it still all heathen that distant land, and unknown rude monarch, and the parents of these angelic children? Then might it soon be, good Lord, that Allelujah should sound wherever the barbarous Alle reigned! Perhaps he smiled at his own play upon words, as punsters are apt to do, as he strolled away, not we may be sure without a touch of benediction upon the shining tawny heads of the little Saxon lions. But smiling was not all

it came to. The thought dwelt with him as he pursued his way, by the great round of the half-ruined Colosseum, more ruinous probably then than now, and down the long street to the Latin gate, where Pelagius and all the work of his secretaryship awaited him. The Pope was old and wanted cheering, especially in those dark days when the invader so often raged without, and Tiber was slowly swelling within, muttering wrath and disaster; while no force existed, to be brought against one enemy or another but the prayers of a few old men. Gregory told the story of his encounter, perhaps making the old Pope laugh at the wit so tempered with devotion, before he put forth his plea for a band of missionaries to be sent to those unknown regions to convert that beautiful and wonderful fair-haired race. Pelagius was very willing to give his consent; but where were men to be found to risk themselves and their lives on such a distant expedition among the savages of that unknown island? When it was found that nobody would undertake such a perilous mission, Gregory, who would naturally have become more determined in respect to it after every repulse, offered himself; and somehow managed to extort a consent from the Pope, of which he instantly took advantage, setting out at once with a band of faithful brethren, among whom no doubt must have been some of those who had accompanied him when he was Nuncio into scenes so different, and pressed him on with their advice and criticism while he opened to them the mysteries of Scripture. They might be tyrannical in their suggestions, but no doubt the impulse of the apostles – "let us die with him" –

was strong in their hearts.

No sooner was it known, however, in Rome that Gregory had left the city on so distant and perilous a mission than the people rose in a sudden tumult. They rushed together from all the quarters of the city in excited bands towards the Lateran, surrounding the Pope with angry cries and protests, demanding the recall of the preacher, whose eloquence as well as his great benefactions to the poor had made him to the masses the foremost figure in the Church. The Pope, frightened by this tumult, yielded to the demand, and sent off messengers in hot haste to bring the would-be missionary back. The picture which his biographers afford us is less known than the previous incidents, yet full of character and picturesque detail. The little band had got three days on in their journey – one wonders from what port they meant to embark, for Ostia, the natural way, was but a few hours from Rome – when they made their usual halt at noon for refreshment and rest "in the fields." Gregory had seated himself under the shade of a tree with a book to beguile the warm and lingering hours. And as he sat thus reading with all the bustle of the little encampment round him, men and horses in the outdoor freedom enjoying the pause, the shade, and needful food – a locust suddenly alighted upon his page, on the roll of parchment which was then the form of the latest editions. Such a visitor usually alights for a moment and no more; but Gregory was too gentle a spectator of all life to dash the insect off, and it remained there with a steadiness and "mansuetude" unlike the

habits of the creature. The good monk began to be interested, to muse and pun, and finally to wonder. "Locusta," he said to himself, groping for a meaning, "loca sta." What could it signify but that in this place he would be made to stay? He called to his attendants to make ready with all speed and push on, eager to get beyond the reach of pursuit; but before the cumbrous train could be got under way again, the Pope's messengers arrived "bloody with spurring, fiery red with haste," and the missionaries were compelled to return to Rome. Thus his first attempt for the conversion of England was to have been made, could he have carried out his purpose, by himself.

There is a curious story also related of Gregory in his walks through Rome, the issue of which, could an unbelieving age put faith in it, would be even more remarkable. One day as he passed by the Forum of Trajan – then no doubt a spot more wildly ruinous than now, though still with some of its great galleries and buildings standing among overthrown monuments and broken pillars – some one told him the story of Trajan and the widow, which must have greatly affected the mediæval imagination since Dante has introduced it in his great poem. The prayer addressed to the Emperor on his way to the wars was the same as that of the widow in the parable, "Avenge me of mine adversary." "I will do so when I return," the Emperor replied. "But who will assure me that you will ever return?" said the importunate widow; upon which the Emperor, recognising the justice of the objection, stopped his warlike progress until he had executed the vengeance

required, upon one of his own officials (is it not said by one authority his own son?) who had wronged her. Gregory was as much impressed by this tale as Dante. He went on lamenting that such a man, so just, so tolerant of interruption, so ready to do what was right, should be cut off from the Divine mercy. He carried this regret with him all the way to the tomb of the apostles, where he threw himself on his knees and prayed with all his heart that the good Trajan, the man who did right according to the light that was in him, at all costs, should be saved. Some versions of the story add that he offered to bear any penance that might be put upon him for his presumption, and was ready to incur any penalty to secure this great boon. It can never be put to proof in this world whether Gregory's petition was heard or not, but his monks and biographers were sure of it, and some of them allege that his own bodily sufferings and weakness were the penalty which he accepted gladly for the salvation of that great soul. The story proves at least the intense humanity and yearning over the unhappy, which was in his heart. Whether he played and punned in tender humour with the objects of his sympathy, or so flung himself in profoundest compassion into the abyss of hopelessness with them, that he could wish himself like Paul accursed for his brethren's sake – Gregory's being was full of brotherly love and fervent feeling, a love which penetrated even beyond the limits of visible life.

The four years that elapsed between his return to his convent and his election to the Popedom (or to speak more justly the

bishopric of Rome) were years of trouble. In addition to the constant danger of invasion, the misery, even when that was escaped, of the tales brought to Rome by the fugitives who took refuge there from all the surrounding country, in every aggravation of poverty and wretchedness, and the efforts that had to be made for their succour – a great inundation of the Tiber, familiar yet terrible disaster from which Rome has not even now been able to secure herself, took place towards the end of the period, followed by a terrible pestilence, its natural result. Gregory was expounding the prophet Ezekiel in one of the Roman churches at the time of this visitation: but as the plague increased his sorrowful soul could not bear any bondage of words or thoughts apart from the awful needs of the moment, and closing the book, he poured forth his heart to the awed and trembling people, exhorting all to repent, and to fling themselves upon God's mercy that the pestilence might be stayed. In all such terrible emergencies it is the impulse of human nature to take refuge in something that can be done, and the impulse is no doubt itself of use to relieve the crushing weight of despair, whatever may be the form it takes.

We clean and scrub and whitewash in our day, and believe in these ways of arresting the demons; but in old Rome the call for help was more impressive at least, and probably braced the souls of the sufferers as even whitewash could not do. The manner in which Gregory essayed to turn the terrible tide was by a direct appeal to Heaven. He organised a great simultaneous procession

from all the quarters of Rome to meet at "the Church of the Virgin" – we are not informed which – in one great united outcry to God for mercy. The septiform litany, as it was called, was chanted through the desolate streets by gradually approaching lines, the men married and unmarried, the priests and monks each approaching in a separate band; while proceeding from other churches came the women in all their subdivisions, the wives, the widows, the maidens, the dedicated virgins, Ancillæ Dei, each line converging towards the centre, each followed no doubt from windows within which the dying lay with tears and echoes of prayers. Many great sights there have been in old Rome, but few could have been more melancholy or impressive than this. We hear of no miraculous picture, no saintly idol as in later ceremonials, but only the seven processions with their long-drawn monotones of penitence, the men by themselves, the women by themselves, the widows in their mourning, the veiled nuns, the younger generation, boys and girls, most precious of all. That Gregory should have had the gift to see, or believe that he saw, a shining angel upon Hadrian's tomb, pausing and sheathing his sword as the long line of suppliants drew near, is very soothing and human to think of. Fresh from his studies of Ezekiel or Job, though too sick at heart with present trouble to continue them, why should he have doubted that the Hearer of Prayer might thus grant a visible sign of the acceptance which He had promised? We do not expect such visions nowadays, nor do we with such intense and united purpose seek them; but the

same legend connects itself with many such periods of national extremity. So late as the Great Plague of London a similar great figure, radiant in celestial whiteness, was also reported to be seen as the pestilence abated, sheathing, in the same imagery, a blazing sword.

The story of the septiform litany relates how here and there in the streets as they marched the dead and dying fell out of the very ranks of the suppliants. But yet the angel sheathed his sword. It is hard to recall the splendid monument of Hadrian with its gleaming marbles and statues as the pilgrim of to-day approaches the vast but truncated and heavy round of the Castle of St. Angelo; but it does not require so great an effort of the mind to recall that scene, when the great angel standing out against the sky existed but in Gregory's anxious eyes, and was reflected through the tears of thousands of despairing spectators, who stood trembling between the Omnipotence which could save in a moment and the terrible Death which seized and slew while they were looking on. No human heart can refuse to beat quicker at such a spectacle – the good man in his rapture of love and earnestness with his face turned to that radiant Roman sky, and all the dark lines of people arrested in their march gazing too, the chant dying from their lips, while the white angel paused for a moment and sheathed the sword of judgment over their heads.

It was not till many centuries later, when every relic of the glories of the great Emperor's tomb had been torn from its walls, that the angel in marble, afterwards succeeded by the present

angel in bronze, was erected on the summit of the Castle of St. Angelo, which derives from this incident its name – a name now laden with many other associations and familiar to us all.

Pope Pelagius was one of the victims of this great plague; and it is evident from all the circumstances recorded that Gregory was already the most prominent figure in Rome, taking the chief place, not only in such matters as the public penitence, but in all the steps necessary to meet so great a calamity. Not only were his powers as an administrator very great, but he had the faculty of getting at those sacred hordes of ecclesiastical wealth, the Church's treasures of gold and silver plate, which a secular ruler could not have touched. Gregory's own liberality was the best of lessons, and though he had already sacrificed so much he had yet, it would appear, something of his own still to dispose of, as we have already found to be the case in so many instances, no doubt rents or produce of estates which could not be alienated, though everything they produced was freely given up. Already the wealth of the Church had been called into requisition to provide for the fugitives who had taken refuge from the Lombards in Rome. These riches, however, were now almost exhausted by the wants of the disorganised commonwealth, where every industry and occupation had been put out of gear, and nothing but want and misery, enfeebled bodies, and discouraged hearts remained. It was inevitable that at such a time Gregory should be the one man to whom every eye turned as the successor of Pelagius. The clergy, the nobles, and the populace, all accustomed to take a part

in the choice of the bishop, pronounced for him with one voice. It is a kind of fashion among the saints that each one in his turn should resist and refuse the honours which it is wished to thrust upon him; but there was at least sufficient reason in Gregory's case for resistance. For the apostolical see, which was far from being a bed of roses at any time, was at that period of distress and danger one of the most onerous posts in the world.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.