

THE ETERNAL CITY

BY RUSSELL STURGIS



THE central thought of this book is the unity of Rome from the earliest historical or even pre-historic days down to the time of Leo XIII. That it should seem practicable to find such unity in a city which at certain times in its long existence ceased almost wholly to be a city of men, and which for nearly a thousand years was thinly peopled, unsettled, unorganized, ungoverned, desolate, the scene of private warfare and of constantly repeated tempests of war from without; that it should seem to this accomplished writer possible to establish the truth of a unity embracing and overcoming all this distress and disunion, argues a theme of such dignity and importance that no treatment can wholly spoil it. For three hundred and fifty years, more or less, the annals of Rome are mere fiction and fable, and perhaps our author allows too

much importance to the peculiar shape which these fantastic tales of the past have taken in the writing of that one historian whose book has come down to us.

For three hundred and fifty years, from the supposed time of the foundation of Rome, the records are fabulous, mere family legends, popular ballads, priestly concoctions, and a popular abstract of all these which served, no doubt, as a sort of pabulum for the school-boys. Then for eight hundred years there is what may be called the history of Rome, irritatingly insufficient, all marred by great gaps where nothing is left for us in the absence of the work of some historian who is for us merely a name, or of the lost chapters of Livy, or of Tacitus, and under the empire, deficient apparently because the imperial system did not tend to the encouragement of detailed record of its doings. These eight hundred years were the time of Rome's growth, greatness and decline. Then came the hideous Middle Ages—more hideous in Rome than elsewhere in Europe, if we ignore the little quarrels of the lands beyond the boundaries of the greater states, and more dis-

AVE ROMA IMMORTALIS. By F. Marion Crawford. With a Map, Photogravures, etc. The Macmillan Co., 1898. Two volumes, crown 8vo, \$6.00.

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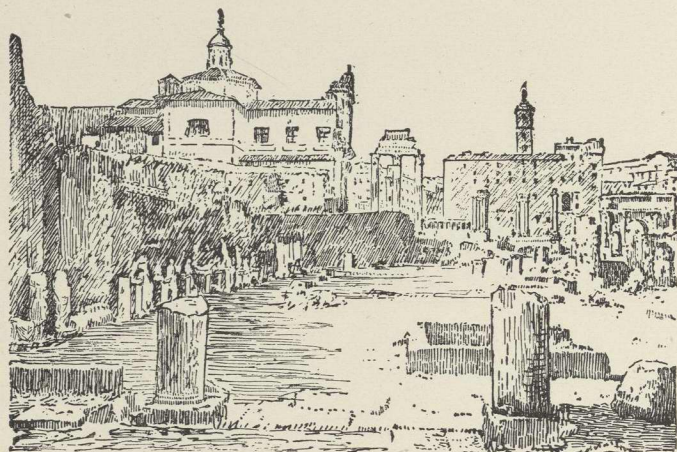
treassing even than they in the crowding of so much evil within so small a territorial limit. And then comes the quieter Rome of the post-Renaissance period, always becoming more and more a priestly city in spite of the growing independence which checks priestly power in certain directions where it was free enough in earlier times.

In the workmen and the salesmen, the men, women and children, the coming and going of the modern city and its contemporary towns of central and eastern Italy, Mr. Crawford has found the safe ground of inference concerning the manners and the doings of the Romans of earlier times; but this knowledge, if it may be called so, will be more accurate for the Middle Ages than for antiquity. Local stories of strife and of bloodshed abound for the Middle Ages and yet are little known to the readers of books; while such stories are comparatively few for the classical centuries, and what there are have long been familiar. Details, which are the life of such stories, are more familiar to the author when he reaches mediæval Rome than they seem in the matter of the ancient city.

One regrets the absence of any distinc-

tion between the patrician of the early days and the noble of the times of conquest and of civil war. In like manner, the picture of early Rome as a plain and bare city of little brown houses rather vexes the student, who learns that Rome must have been an Etruscan city in its outward shape and must have glowed with colored terra-cotta. And yet the chapters numbered I and II, which deal with the making of the city and the empire, give, in the space of fifty-five small octavo pages, a social history of Rome without the dates or minor facts, that, though not fraught with novelty for scholars, is admirable reading and cannot but contain much that is novel to most readers in the way of conclusions and summings up, which, though safe and conservative, are yet new except in the treatises of a few archaeologists. These two chapters are to be considered as an introduction; for, as has been suggested above, the local and anecdotal annals of Rome are mediæval and post-mediæval rather than classical.

The real interest of the book begins with Chapter III, the City of Augustus, although in this chapter we see ancient Rome through the eyes of Horace, and we see it clearly for a moment. From this



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 ATRIUM OF VESTA

we pass to a brief discussion of the tendency toward religious belief of the Roman people in all ages, as distinguished from the Italian tendency toward scepticism. "In Roman history there is a succession of religious epochs not to be found in the annals of any other city." It was a matter-of-fact kind of belief — the modern devotee will say — at least the faith of the Romans of the re-



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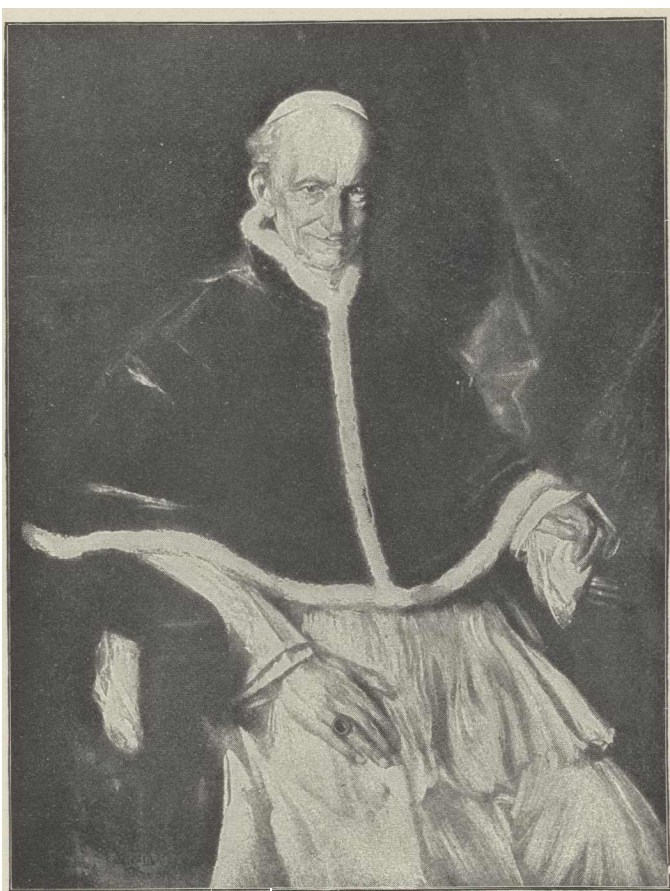
ISLAND IN THE TIBER

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publican times was so bound up with the state and with the service of the state, and the belief of the Romans of the imperial times was so much a matter of whimsical mysticism and of seeking for new gods in strange eastern lands, that the Roman tendency to belief hardly recommends itself to the pietist of to-day. In Chapter IV, *The Middle Age*, the thought goes backward again to the days of the early Republic, to the laws of startling severity, which gave all power to the father of each family, and crushed the slave beneath the absolute discretion of the master, and to the strange growth from this to the character of Roman society toward the unimaginable luxury of the imperial days.

From this point on the book is made up chiefly of separate chapters devoted to the separate regions of Rome. There are fourteen of these regions, and they are enumerated at the beginning of Chapter V, the story of these in their separate entity

beginning with Monti, the largest region of all, the one which occupies the eastern part of the space within the walls and includes the Quirinal, the Esquiline and the Coelian. To each of these regions is devoted in its own chapter much discussion of the most remarkable buildings and sites within its limits, with abundant allusion to ancient and mediæval, military and clerical, disorderly and peaceful scenes of Rome's history, a singular collection of details of internecine warfare of the cruellest kind, mingled with acts of devotion and piety such as becomes the history of the most remarkable of mediæval cities; for it is of the mediæval city that these are naturally the most numerous. The magnificent traditions of classical Rome are lost except for the few which remain to us misrepresented and discolored, dimly seen in the pages of those classical writers whose works remain to us. But the mediæval city still lives in legend, which is



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POPE LEO XIII

The book would perhaps be more attractive if a more simple, a less highly wrought style could have been employed. It is, after all, fatiguing to read page after page and chapter after chapter in which the language is kept at the same somewhat strained elevation. In spite of this disfigurement, however, the unsystematic record and the naturally discursive account of regions, quarters, streets, squares, churches and palaces, each bringing to the memory of the writer some part of his great store of recollections, must be of ceaseless interest to everyone who cares for history in this purely narrative form. The author's social and anthropological reflections, while they add to the discursive nature of the text, increase rather than diminish the charac-

not so very far from belonging to our own times, nor, if Mr. Crawford is to be believed, so very far from us in custom or in spirit. It is evident to him that the Roman people of to-day are the not unworthy successors of the ferocious partisan warriors of the tenth and fourteenth centuries.

Such a mass of romantic tales, bloody and mystical, full of personages and events of the most strongly marked contrast of weakness and piety, naturally lends itself to treatment in a somewhat fantastic, even a somewhat turgid style, and it cannot be asserted that Mr. Crawford has wholly avoided this temptation.

teristic tone of romantic thought, because insisting upon the importance and true nature of the stories told. To anyone who loves romance, it would seem that romance which has really taken shape in the world's history and for which the record is clear enough and veritable enough to be believed as history must always be believed, with drawbacks and with exceptions taken, should be more entertaining than romance which is of pure invention. This as it may be; there can be nowhere a more striking collection of brilliant tales, nor a more interesting thread upon which to string these beads of romance, than the thread of history of this mighty town of Rome.