

From Rome to Mentana by Emma M. Pearson

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BY SYLVANUS URBAN, GENT.

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(BEING THE TWO-HUNDRED-AND-TWENTY-FOURTH SINCE THE COMMENCEMENT.)

LAST AUTUMN IN ROME.^a



It is extraordinary, considering the excitement which prevailed in England last autumn during Garibaldi's abortive effort against Rome, that so few authors have endeavoured to turn the occasion to account, and to supplement, by well-considered digests of facts drawn from authentic sources, the necessarily brief and crude statements which proceeded from the pens of newspaper correspondents at the time.

The author of "From Rome to Mentana" is a lady, and she writes

with all a lady's wit and liveliness ; but she has given us in her little volume something more than ladies generally manage to produce, and that is a truthful, reliable, and impartial narrative of events more pregnant with interest to Italy and to Europe than any which have occurred since the eventful year of the Revolution of 1848. Indeed, the work before us might easily pass even for the work of the practised pen of a "ready writer," well versed in politics and conversant with the world of European affairs ; and it abounds besides with graphic description and sparkling anecdote. The writer gives us an account of her journey from London to Florence, and thence to Rome ; and the story of the night spent by her and her fellow-travellers—three other "unprotected females"—at the miserable station at Orbitello, in the midst of wounded Garibaldian soldiers, is admirably told. So is her interview with the Roman *gendarmerie*, who intruded on her in her drawing-room in the Rue d'Espagne. She writes :—

"I headed part of the sergeant's front-door party into the dining-room, where the first thing they perceived was the Union Jack standing in a corner ready for use. Now it so happened, that it was so folded that nothing but the red was visible, and these heroes made a rush at it : it was evidently a Garibaldian flag. I must own that I was delighted when, on shaking it out ferociously, the dear old union in the corner became visible to all beholders, and they put it down, saying in a disappointed tone, 'It is nothing but an English flag.' 'You will find it something, if you meddle with it,' I growled. At this instant the back-door party entered by the opposite door, with the elegant Colonel at their head, attended by my friend, who was half frightened and half amused—and pointed out the Union Jack as a proof that we were really English, on which he most gracefully took off his hat to it ; an act for which I forgave him his unceremonious *entrée*, and merely gratified my spite by asking in the politest of tones, 'How many more dragoons, Colonel, to look after seven women ?'"

Among the best parts of the book are the accounts of the writer's visit to the battle-fields of Mentana and Monte Rotondo, before the blood was dry or the corpses all buried ; the entry of the poor Garibaldian prisoners into Rome ; and the chapters on the Roman hospitals and the heroic Bishop of Albano.

With respect to Garibaldi's enterprise, it is the writer's opinion that immediately after the battle of Monte Rotondo, Garibaldi lost the best possible chance of taking Rome. She says :—

"It was my wonder then, and it is still, that Garibaldi did not push on that day. He might have had Rome cheap ; there was not eight hundred fighting men in the place to oppose him, for at that time the Papal troops had not been recalled from Frosinone, Velletri, and the other towns they were garrisoning, and the troops in Rome were worn out, dispirited, and broken."

The honesty of Garibaldi and his followers has been seriously impeached ; but the following statements seem to contradict such insinuations :—"We heard the same account of the conduct of the Garibaldians here as elsewhere ; they paid for everything they had except, as usual, forage and labour at the barricades, for which notes signed 'G. Garibaldi' were given. They behaved with perfect order and propriety, and seem

have left a good impression behind them The Garibaldini paid for everything they had, except forage for the horses, which they took, and gave promissory notes for the amount, signed 'G. Garibaldi.' No doubt, had he succeeded, they would have been cashed—at present, of course, they are worth nothing ; but they are being carefully preserved, under the idea that, assuredly, some day or other, they will be worth as much as the Scudo notes of the Bank of Rome."

And again:—"There can be little doubt that had the attempt of Garibaldi and his friends succeeded, their utmost influence would have been used to preserve their native city with all its treasures of art as untouched as possible—regarding it as they did and do, as the future capital of Italy, to be adorned and beautified rather than ravaged and destroyed. Nor did I ever hear of any one, save the ecclesiastics themselves, who expressed any fears for the safety of life and property, even had the fully expected entrance of Garibaldi into the city taken place. There was more danger from within than from without."

But while the writer thus expresses her sympathies in favour of Garibaldi, she has room to say many a good word of the supreme Pontiff:—"Personally the Pope is beloved and esteemed ; of stainless character, courteous manners, and much natural kindness of heart, he ought, indeed, to be so. He has spent most munificently the money he has received, not in personal aggrandisements, or that of his family, but in adorning and beautifying Rome, and the towns in his territory, and the splendid viaduct which bridges the defile between Larsicia and Albano is a worthy monument of his generosity. Unlike most pontiffs, he has scrupulously avoided enriching his relations—his only sister lives in obscurity, almost poverty, near Ancona, and when his brother's daughter was married, a few years ago, he gave her a dowry from his private fortune. It is even said that the Peter's pence subscribed for him during his exile at Gaëta was expended in the beautifying of his city on his return All during the times of trouble, I never knew Pius IX. blamed or evil spoken of ; his charity and kindness, his innate liberality of heart, were always mentioned as his own ; those acts which irritated the people almost beyond endurance, were always put down to the account of 'evil advisers around him.'"

The truly liberal and large-hearted views which make themselves visible throughout the book are such as will commend "From Rome to Mentana" to all but bigots of extreme opinions on either side ; and we feel that we cannot do better than close this brief notice with the writer's concluding remark, which will give a clue to the general scope and tendency of her work:—"I earnestly wish that the question of *Roma per Italia* were settled, and the nation at peace ; but this seems far off : darkness and uncertainty veil the future fate of the Eternal City. Whatever it may be, I would express a hope that the closing years of Pius IX., at all events, may be passed in peace. They can be but few ; and then his successor in the chair of St. Peter will take his place upon it fully prepared for what, sooner or later, I believe to be inevitable—the fall of the Temporal Power, which Pio Nono is pledged to retain intact ; and Italy then may have struggled through her financial difficulties, and be in a better position to make Rome her capital. Till then all must be unsettled."