ST. PETER'S PRESENCE IN ROME: THE MONUMENTAL EVIDENCE

ALTHOUGH this essay is concerned with the monumental evidence for the connection between St. Peter and the Church in Rome, it is necessary for a complete understanding of the subject to mention the information that we have in the New Testament and in other literary sources about the last years of his life. One thing is certain: there is no evidence of any kind that he ended his life anywhere but in Rome.

I. EVIDENCE FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

In Acts xii. 18 we are told that Peter, after his deliverance from prison, " went to another place ". Many Roman Catholic authors think that the " other place " was Rome. This was the view of Jerome, who states that Peter went to Rome in the second year of Claudius. This date is also about twenty-five years before the traditional date of his death. An early calendar of Roman bishops states that he was Bishop of Rome for twenty-five years. As none of the apostles seem to have been territorial bishops in the usual sense of the term, we need not take this statement to mean any more than that St. Peter had some connection with the Church in Rome over a period of twenty-five years. The idea in this form should not be summarily rejected.[1] It is supported by some late monumental evidence, as we shall see later on.

If St. Peter did come to Rome during the reign of Claudius, it is very probable that he was obliged to leave Rome when Claudius expelled the Jews at the time of Prisca and Aquila's

[1 Our reading of the literary evidence leads us to conclusions differing in certain details from Mr. Nunn's. We think it probable that the Roman Church had its origin in some of those "sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes" who were in Jerusalem at the first Christian Pentecost and heard Peter preach then (it is significant that these Roman visitors are the only European contingent specifically mentioned in the list of visitors in Acts ii. 9–11). "By the autumn following the crucifixion it is quite as possible that Jesus was honoured in the Jewish community at Rome as that He was at Damascus" (F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *Peter, Prince of Apostles* [1927], p. 195). The first stage of the history of this community will have come to an end with the dispersion resulting from Claudius's edict of A.D. 49. The second would begin after the accession of Nero in 54, when the return to Rome of the dispersed Jewish Christians (including Aquila and Prisca, if we may judge from Rom. xvi. 3) coincided with Peter's first visit to Rome. Lactantius seems to us to preserve a more accurate tradition of Peter's twenty-five years' ministry when he says that the apostles "dispersed throughout the world to proclaim the Gospel, and *for twenty-five years, until the beginning of Nero's reign,* they laid the foundation of the Church throughout the provinces and cities. *Nero was already in power when Peter came to Rome*" (*de mort. persec.* ii). There is ground for believing that Peter left Rome at some

migration to Corinth. We find that he was in Jerusalem at the time of the Council about A.D. 50; and we learn from the Epistle to the Galatians that he was in Antioch at some unspecified time. He may also have visited Corinth.

In his First Epistle he sends greetings from " the Church which is elect with you in Babylon ". By this he certainly means the Church in Rome. Babylon is used as a mystic name for Rome in the Apocalypse. It has been suggested that the First Epistle was written in the early days of the persecution of Nero, and is a persecution document. This would account for the way in which its place of origin is described and for the absence of any salutations, except that from " Marcus my son ". The name Marcus was too common to cause any danger to the person mentioned; and the name Babylon would mean nothing to the Roman police.

It has been objected that if St. Peter had anything to do with the founding of the Church in Rome he would have been mentioned in the Epistle to the Romans and in the Epistles of the Captivity. St. Paul, however, states in the Epistle to the Romans that he had not so far gone to Rome, lest he should build on another man's foundations. It is not impossible that the " other man " was St. Peter.

It is again objected that it had been agreed that St. Paul should go to the Gentiles and St. Peter to the Jews. This is a serious objection to the theory that St. Peter was the actual founder of the Church in Rome, but it should be remembered that there were many Jews there, and that the Epistle to the Romans devotes some space to a refutation of their views as to the obligation to keep the law of Moses.

All that we can say is that the evidence of the New Testament is not decisive against the presence of St. Peter in Rome at some time in the course of his life, and that it decidedly supports the view that he was there before his death.

Travel was quick and easy in the Roman Empire. It is not impossible that St. Peter visited Rome several times in the course of his missionary journeys. This supposition seems necessary to account for the deep impression that he made on the memory of the Romans. Few, even among the most sceptical historians, now deny that he was put to death in Rome; and the

time between 55 and 60, returned for a second time about 63 (when he wrote 1 Peter) and met his death in the persecution which broke out in Rome the following year.—ED.]

tradition that he was put to death by crucifixion finds some support from the last chapter of the Gospel of St. John.

It may as well be said once for all that neither the New Testament nor any early writer gives any support to the theory that St. Peter was Bishop of Rome in the ordinary sense of the term. Still less is any support to be found in any literary or monumental source for the belief that he was the infallible Vicar of Christ and that he transmitted his powers to his successors.

There is much monumental evidence, some of it rather late, that the Roman Church felt a special reverence for St. Peter. Though St. Paul was also remembered with respect, he always takes the second place. The early Bishops of Rome were not buried round the tomb of St. Paul but round that of St. Peter. If St. Peter had never come to Rome, or even if he had only been there for a short time before his death, these facts require some explanation.

II. LITERARY EVIDENCE FROM EARLY WRITERS

The earliest literary evidence for the connection between St. Peter and the Church in Rome is incidental, and had nothing of the nature of propaganda. It seems to assume a fact which no one doubted.

When Clement of Rome, who wrote a letter intended to appease a quarrel which had arisen in the Church of Corinth towards the end of the first century, wishes to give an example from the experience of his readers of the evil effects of strife and envy, he mentions how suffering and death were brought upon Peter and Paul by envy and bitter feeling in the Roman Church. He makes no attempt to tell their story, which he obviously supposes is quite familiar to the Corinthians.

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, in writing to the Roman Church about twenty years later, says, " I do not command you like Peter and Paul ", but nothing more.

Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth about the year 170, in a letter addressed to Rome, speaks of the seed which had been planted by Peter and Paul, both at Rome and in Corinth, and says that these apostles taught in Italy and suffered martyrdom about the same time.[1]

A few years later Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, who knew Rome

[1] Eusebius, *Church History*, ii. 25.

well, in dealing with the origin of the Gospels, says that Matthew wrote his Gospel while Peter and Paul were evangelising and founding the Church of Rome. He gives a list of Roman bishops in these words: "While the blessed apostles were founding and building up the Church, they entrusted the work of a bishop to Linus. Paul makes mention of this Linus in his Epistle to Timothy. Anacletus succeeded him. After him in the third place from the apostles the bishopric was allotted to Clement, who saw the apostles and lived with them."[1] It should be noted that Irenaeus implies that Peter and Paul appointed Linus to be Bishop of Rome during their lifetime. No early writer says that Peter was the first Bishop of Rome, any more than any of them say that John was the first Bishop of Ephesus. The apostles were regarded as the *founders* of these Churches and as directing them when they were present, but not as territorial bishops. They appointed suitable persons to act in their absence and to carry on their work after their death, as Clement of Rome expressly says.

Irenaeus and Tertullian, who lived at the beginning of the third century, had no intention of writing a history of the Church, The object of their extant books was to refute heretics who claimed that they and their teachers had a special knowledge of the truth of Christianity confided to them secretly by the apostles which knowledge had never been imparted to ordinary Christians. For this reason they were called "Gnostics", or people who know. In order to refute these heretics, Irenaeus, and still more Tertullian, appealed to the teaching known to be prevalent in Churches which it was admitted had been founded by apostles, such as Rome, Corinth and Ephesus, and to the interpretation of the New Testament which was given in these churches. They asked, very pertinently, whether it was possible that the apostles had misled their hearers in these Churches, or only told them part of the truth. They, therefore, naturally gave the names of the apostles who were believed to have taught in these well-known and accessible cities, and of their successors. If the heretics had been able to show that, for example, St. Peter had never been to Rome, and that, therefore, there was no probability that his true teaching had been preserved there, there is not the slightest doubt that they would have done so. Moreover, it is improbable in the last degree that a man like Tertullian, who

[1] Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, iii. 3.

had begun life as a distinguished pagan lawyer and who was certainly a most acute controversialist, would have used an argument which he knew to be so doubtful, that his adversaries could easily disprove it.[1]

Eusebius tells us (*Church History*, ii. 25) that Gaius, a Roman presbyter who lived at the beginning of the third century, said: "I can show you the trophies of the apostles. If you will go to the Vatican or to the Ostian Way, you will find the trophies of those who founded the Church." Eusebius confirms this statement, apparently from his own observation, by saying that the names of Peter and Paul remained in the cemeteries of Rome until his time.

In dealing with the early history of the Church of Rome, it should never be forgotten that the archives of this Church were so thoroughly destroyed by Diocletian that Pope Damasus, who was the son of the keeper of these archives, could find little evidence about the history of the martyrs whom he commemorated in his inscriptions, except from a doubtful tradition, or, in the case of the most recent martyrs, from the evidence of old men whom he consulted when he was a boy. This he makes quite plain. According to Dean Milman, a document, dating from the pontificate of Damasus or soon after it, praises the discretion of the Roman Church in not publicly reading the martyrologies then in circulation, as it was not known by whom or when they were written. It has, however, been proved by excavations that the statements made in these martyrologies are generally trustworthy, as far as concerns the burial-places of the martyrs.

III. EARLY MONUMENTAL EVIDENCE

The earliest piece of monumental evidence which we possess with regard to the presence of St. Peter in Rome may seem to some of little value—while to others its very nature may make it seem convincing.

In the Cemetery of Priscilla, which is certainly one of the earliest in Rome, there is a gallery cut in such fragile rock that it was found necessary, in quite early times, to face the walls with brick, and so to cover up the *loculi* in which the dead are laid. When these bricks were removed in the last century, it was found that the *loculi* had been closed with tiles on which the names of the dead were painted without any other inscriptions.

[1] Tertullian, *De Praescriptione*, xxxii.

This is a sign of very early date. The name " Peter " was found painted on several of these graves. Peter is not a Roman name. This is a proof that, at a very early date, the apostle was honoured in Rome, and children were called after him.

It is known from Tacitus that the victims of the Neronian persecution were put to death in the gardens of Nero. These were situated outside the walls of Rome in the district known as the Vatican, which contained a large circus, with an obelisk brought from Egypt by Caligula in the middle of the *spina*.[1] An ancient martyrology stated that St. Peter was crucified " *iuxta obeliscum inter duas metas* ".[2] We have seen that the martyrologies were often right in topographical details.

If St. Peter suffered in or soon after the Neronian persecution, it is likely that, as the leader of the Christians, he would be put to death in a conspicuous place such as the centre of the circus would be. It is quite certain that the obelisk referred to stood where it is said to have stood until the latter part of the sixteenth century, when it was removed with enormous trouble and expense by Sixtus V to the middle of the space in front of the rebuilt church of St. Peter on the Vatican. This is proved by many old prints.

The Circus of Nero stood outside the walls of Rome. Therefore it was lawful for a person to be buried close to the road which skirted one of its sides. When Constantine wished to build a church over the place where everyone in his day believed that St. Peter had been buried, he pulled down the Circus and built his church right over the road which once ran along the outer wall of the Circus. By doing this he was able to leave the tomb of the apostle almost undisturbed in the chord of the apse of the church.

This was in accordance with the custom of the time. It was considered impious to remove the bodies of the martyrs, and if a church was built in their honour, no expense or trouble was spared to construct it over the tomb, so that the altar of the church occupied the space above it.[3] In accordance with Roman

[1] A raised ridge or "backbone" dividing the circus longitudinally.

[2] "Near the obelisk, between the two turning-posts."

[3] Exactly the same was done by Constantine for the tomb of St. Paul on the Ostian Way, but there, for some reason, the road by which the tomb stood was not suppressed, and a very small church was built to cover the monument. Later on Valentinian built a church which covered the road, and his successors finished it on such a scale that it almost rivalled St. Peter's. This church retained its primitive form until the early part of the nineteenth century, when it was burnt down. We know exactly what it was like from Piranesi's prints. The tomb of the apostle was just in front of the apse in a great transept.

law the bodies of criminals could be delivered to their friends for burial, and, when once buried, they were free from molestation. It was a most serious crime to interfere with them. (This explains why it was easy for Joseph of Arimathaea to obtain permission from Pilate to bury the body of Jesus in his own new tomb.)

What seems to have happened is that some wealthy person gave the Church a plot of land on the other side of the road along which the Circus of Nero was built. The bodies of the victims of the persecution were buried in this land, and among them St. Peter was included.

Pope Anacletus is said to have erected a memorial on this site, which probably consisted of a two-story building with the tomb of St. Peter in the lower story and a chapel above. This would be quite in accordance with Roman custom, and would excite no comment. All the documents relating to the early history of the Roman Church attest that the Bishops of Rome were buried round this memorial until the end of the second century. This statement has been confirmed by excavations made on the site. Some part of the memorial of Pope Anacletus still remains in the Confession of the present church of St. Peter. When old St. Peter's was pulled down, this building was covered with a solidly built temple and not otherwise interfered with, as may be seen from a contemporary print, now in the Sloane museum, which is reproduced in Mgr. Barnes's *St. Peter in Rome*. What is left of St. Peter's tomb is now far below the level of the present church. A flight of steps leads down to a semicircular space in front of the high altar. Under the altar is a pair of bronze gates which lead into a large niche decorated with a mosaic of Christ. This represents part of the upper story of the memorial of Anacletus. In the floor of this niche is a hole through which objects used to be lowered that they might touch the coffin of St. Peter. This is now partly blocked up.

When the foundations for the enormous *baldacchino* of Bernini were being dug in the early seventeenth century, a number of coffins containing bodies wrapped in bands of linen

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It was surmounted by a mediaeval *baldacchino*, and it has been proved by excavation that the original stone bearing the words PAVLO APOSTOLO MART., which was probably placed there by Constantine, still exists. This church was rebuilt on its original lines, and the tomb was not interfered with. See R. Lanciani, *Pagan and Christian Rome* (1893), chapter iii, and especially pp. 125 ff. and 150 ff.

were found. These were probably the bodies of the early Bishops of Rome. One stone bore the name LINVS.[1] Some stone chests were also found containing masses of burnt bones. As the Christians never burnt their dead, these are most probably the remains of the victims of some " fiery trial ", and may well be those of the martyrs of the persecution of Nero who, as we learn from Tacitus, were generally burnt to death.

Many sarcophagi, some elaborately carved, were found at different times in this region. One very early one is in the Louvre; one of a Prefect of the City is still preserved in the vaults of St. Peter's; others are in the Lateran Museum. They are all Christian sarcophagi. A pagan columbarium was also found, so that it is quite certain that this district was a place of burial, and there is no reason to doubt that St. Peter, his successors and probably his fellow-sufferers were buried there.

One would have expected that, at a time when the controversy between Papists and Protestants as to the presence of St. Peter in Rome was being conducted with so much violence and display of learning, these discoveries would have been published to all the world as a final refutation of Protestant denials. But they were not. The excavations round the tomb of St. Peter were described in much detail by R. Ubaldi, a Canon of St. Peter's, at the time when they were made, but his manuscript lay forgotten in the Vatican Library until the second half of last century when it was published by M. Armellini in his *Le Chiese di Roma* (2nd edition, 1891).[2] An English translation of it is available in A. S. Barnes's *St. Peter in Rome*, published in 1900. He also published a plan of the excavations by Benedetto Drei, which is now in the British Museum. It is as improbable as anything can be that these documents are imaginary accounts or forgeries, written without foundation in fact, and stored away in the hope that they would be found and used as propaganda at some future time.

We may, therefore, take it as well established by monumental evidence that the site on which the Church of St. Peter stands was reverenced from the first century as the burial place of St. Peter. His successors were buried there, and not around the grave of St. Paul. This was the place that Gaius referred to,

[1] Professor Lanciani says that Hrabanus Maurus speaks of the tomb of Linus as being visible and accessible in the year 822 (*Pagan and Christian Rome*, p. 131).

[2] Armellini's book was republished in 1948 in two volumes (1,575 pp.) by Ruffolo, Rome.—ED.]

when he spoke of the " trophy " of the apostle. It was certainly the place over which Constantine built his great church.

IV. LATER MONUMENTAL EVIDENCE

The rest of the monumental evidence for the respect with which the memory of St. Peter was regarded at Rome is later, or comes from a time when no one denies that the Roman Church claimed that she had been founded by the apostle. As far as it goes, it is evidence for the growing idea that Peter was the head of the Church, the supreme lawgiver and the first of a line of bishops, who, in some sense, inherited his prerogatives. Those who have studied early Church history know how soon these claims were made and how they were resisted, boldly at first, but, as time went on, with less and less assurance.

The monumental evidence for these claims is found at first only in the form of symbols. In the paintings in the cemeteries, some of which probably date from the second century, Moses is often represented striking the rock in order to bring water out of it. As this scene is generally represented in connection with a picture of an actual baptism, its original significance was probably no more than that it was an Old Testament type of baptism. In course of time, some lover of symbolism saw an analogy between Moses, the intermediary of the giving of the Old Law, and Peter, the intermediary of the giving of the New Law. Some engraved glasses exist on which the figure striking the rock bears the name of Peter. On sarcophagi of the fourth century a figure striking a rock is represented in close connection with figures representing the arrest of Peter by the soldiers of Herod and also his denial of Christ.

After Christianity had been declared to be a lawful religion and many rich people became Christians, they continued a long-established custom by being buried in elaborately carved sarcophagi. These were no longer decorated with representations of pagan myths or with battle scenes, but with a series of carvings, very closely packed together, representing the story of redemption and of deliverance from persecution and death. Some of these scenes had already been frequently painted in the cemeteries: others seem to be peculiar to the fourth and fifth centuries and to be found only on sarcophagi. They have all one common feature—they are not chosen for artistic reasons, but always for the purpose of teaching dogma.

The series begins with the Creation and the Fall. Deliverance from persecution or trouble is symbolised in the stories of Daniel and of the Three Children: deliverance from sin in the stories of the healing of the paralytic, the healing of the blind and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood. The story of Redemption is occasionally introduced by a representation of the Nativity, but more frequently with a representation of the visit of the Magi, as a symbol of the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles. The death of Christ is commonly represented by the trial before Pilate and occasionally by the crowning with thorns and the carrying of the cross. The crucifixion is never represented, except once on the wooden doors of St. Sabina. Generally its place is taken by a cross bearing the sacred monogram with the soldiers guarding the tomb or the visit of the women to the tomb represented below as a symbol of the resurrection. Baptism is symbolised by Moses (or Peter) striking the rock and rarely by an actual scene of baptism in a river. The Eucharist is often symbolised by the turning of the water into wine and by the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. The hope of resurrection is represented by the story of Jonah, or by the raising of Lazarus.

One very common scene represents Christ seated on the vault of the sky, or standing on the mountain of Paradise in the middle of the disciples. In these scenes He is nearly always represented as giving the roll of the Law to St. Peter while St. Paul stands on His other side. If it be asked how we know that the figure who is represented as taking the roll of the Law from Christ is St. Peter, we must refer back to a remarkable medallion of very early date discovered in the cemetery of Domitilla. On it there are two heads facing one another. One has short curly hair and beard and the other a bald head and a long beard. There can be little doubt that these are intended to be portraits of Peter and Paul. There is nothing remarkable in the fact that people who were so fond of portrait statues as the Romans should have desired to have and should have preserved the likenesses of those who first brought Christianity to Rome. At any rate these types are always preserved in art when the two apostles are represented, and the tradition lasted until Albrecht Dürer painted his famous pictures of St. Peter and St. Mark with St. Paul and St. John.

We have already said that the scenes carved on sarcophagi were always chosen for the purpose of teaching dogma. When, therefore, we find the story of the denial of Peter and the story

of his arrest by men dressed in eastern costumes so often represented in connection with the figure striking the rock, we may be sure that this was done for some good reason. It seems almost certain, for example, that the scene of the arrest of St. Peter by two persons in eastern costume is intended to refer to his arrest in Jerusalem and shows it was believed in the fourth century that this had been the occasion of his first visit to Rome. We have already noted that Jerome, who was living at that time, stated that St. Peter first came to Rome at a date which closely corresponds with the date of his imprisonment by Herod.

Such representations are, of course, not a monumental proof of the truth of the Roman claim to supremacy; but they are evidence of what was commonly believed in Rome during the fourth century by educated and wealthy people about the coming of Peter to that city and about the authority which he transmitted to his successors. We know from literary sources the claims that the Bishops of Rome made as early as the latter part of the second century and how they were resisted by such men as Irenaeus, Tertullian and Cyprian. We know how these claims were extended. The monuments show us that by the fourth century they had become almost a matter of faith in Rome. They were then put in the same cycle of dogmatic teaching as the doctrines of the Fall and of Redemption and Immortality.

Before long symbolism was not considered a plain enough method of stating the Roman claim to supremacy. Towards the beginning of the fifth century Celestine I put up a large mosaic in the church of St. Sabina with the words:

> Culmen apostolicum cum Celestinus haberet,
> Solus et in toto fulgeret episcopus orbe.[1]

V. THE CHURCH OF ST. PUDENZIANA

We now pass on to consider what grounds there are for believing that St. Peter had some connection with two churches with which his name is traditionally associated.

The first is the church of St. Pudenziana. This church is situated on the Viminal hill, and is certainly built over the ruins of a Roman house which may still be visited and which was used as a place of worship until the early middle ages. It is said that this house belonged to the senator Pudens who is mentioned with Linus in the Second Epistle to Timothy. Pudens had two

[1] "When Celestine held the highest point of apostleship and shone alone as bishop in the whole world."

daughters, Pudenziana and Praxedis. They are said to have given their father's house to the Church in the days of Pius I, and it is also said that St. Peter preached and celebrated the Eucharist in this house on a wooden table, part of which is preserved in the Lateran.

In early documents this church is called *Ecclesia Pudentiana* or *Titulus Pudentis*, and in these names the memory of the original owner of the property is preserved rather than that of his daughter. A church dedicated to Praxedis is situated on the other side of the street and probably once formed part of the same property, as did also certain baths belonging to Novatus and Timothy near which, according to his *Acta*, Justin Martyr lived when he taught in Rome.

There is, therefore, good evidence that this district was inhabited by Christians from an early date, and there is no reason to doubt the tradition that both St. Peter and St. Paul may have had some connection with it. The existing church is uninteresting, because it was rebuilt at a bad period, like most Roman churches, but it contains the oldest and finest Christian apsidal mosaic in Rome, which represents Christ seated in the New Jerusalem among the apostles, with the emblems of the evangelists behind Him, and two aged female figures, one on each side of Him, offering Him their crowns. There can be no doubt that these figures are intended to represent the daughters of Pudens. The mosaic is believed to have been erected at the end of the fourth century.

This church was closely connected with the cemetery of Priscilla, one of the oldest in Rome. The senator Pudens who owned the house in which some of the early Christian converts in Rome met, and the Priscilla who owned the estate in which some of them were buried, were probably related. The noble family of the Acilii Glabriones had a crypt in this cemetery, and it is also there, as we have mentioned, that we find the name Peter on some early tombs. According to the itineraries written for pilgrims in the early middle ages, Pudens, Praxedis and Pudenziana were buried in this cemetery, and another ancient authority states that the bodies of Aquila and Prisca (Priscilla), the friends of St. Paul, were removed from this same place.

VI. THE CHURCH OF ST. SEBASTIAN

There is also a site on the Appian Way, now covered by the Church of St. Sebastian, which is closely connected by tradition

with the memory of St. Peter and to some extent with that of St. Paul.

A church was built there in the fourth century called the "Church of the Apostles". An ancient tradition preserved in the *Liber Pontificalis* and the *Calendar of Liberius*, and receiving some support from an ambiguous phrase in an inscription of Damasus set up on this site, records that the bodies of the apostles rested for some time in this place.[1]

Recently excavations have been made under the church which have led to some remarkable discoveries, but have done little to settle the question as to when the bodies of the apostles were brought here or whether they were brought here once or twice, as certain traditions suggest. The excavations have proved that there was once a villa on the site, and that three elaborate underground tombs were excavated in a rockface that formed the side of a deep hollow in the ground close to this villa.

These tombs once belonged to some pagan family which, in course of time, became Christian. For some reason this deep hollow was filled up, the villa was destroyed and the whole site levelled in order that a church might be built on it in the fourth century, about the same time as the churches were built on the Vatican and the Ostian Way in honour of the apostolic founders of the Roman Church. It is difficult to assign any other reason for this costly work except that those who carried it out intended to honour the apostles. The church was certainly called the "Church of the Apostles" when it was first built.

About the same time a curious circular building, called the "Platonia", was constructed near the end of this church. In the middle of this there is a crypt, vaulted with stone and decorated with pictures, in the floor of which is a hollow divided into two parts by a slab of marble. This hollow is large enough to contain two coffins; and it may still be seen. Around the building there were thirteen *arcosolia* or arched niches such as were made in the underground cemeteries for the burial of distinguished or wealthy persons.

[1 Probably during the persecution under Valerian (A.D. 258). See J. Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past* (1946), pp. 374–80. (Finegan gives an excellent summary of the evidence of the catacombs and early churches of Rome on pp. 353 ff. and 410 ff.) It is noteworthy that the tradition of this second burial place in Rome for the two apostles does not seem to have led anyone, on the Ephesian analogy, to conclude that there were two Peters and two Pauls at Rome in the early days of Christianity.—ED.]

Until quite recently this building was, quite naturally, pointed out as the place where the bodies of the apostles had been temporarily buried. The results of the excavations have thrown some doubt on this explanation of the purpose of this strange building, but some archaeologists still suggest that it may have been intended as a memorial or cenotaph. Whatever it was, there can be no doubt that it was regarded as a very holy place. When the body of Quirinus, Bishop of Siscia in Dalmatia, was brought to Rome, to preserve it from the barbarian invasions, it was buried here. Many other persons were also buried under the floor of the Church of the Apostles, and we know that it was considered at that time a great advantage to be buried near the body of a saint and that large sums were paid for this privilege.

The body of St. Sebastian, a famous martyr of the persecution of Diocletian, was also buried in this church, and, in course of time, his fame so overshadowed the waning memory of the connection of the church with the apostles that the church was called the Church of St. Sebastian and retains that name until this day. It was rebuilt in a hideous seventeenth-century style, and now contains nothing of interest, except Bernini's statue of St. Sebastian and a recently formed museum of objects discovered on the site.[1]

In 1909 an underground room was discovered near the Platonia with the words DOMVS PETRI scratched on the wall. This excited great interest, and gave rise to a theory that St. Peter had once lived in this place, and that the story that he and St. Paul had been buried here for a short time was incorrect. Further excavations laid bare the lower part of a ruined building decorated in a manner which suggested that it had once been a way-side place of refreshment and entertainment.

[1] During the Middle Ages the only Christian underground cemetery which was accessible was the one under this church. In early days it had been called the *Coemeterium ad Catacumbas*, which means "the cemetery near the low-lying ground". The other cemeteries which had been frequented by pilgrims from all over Europe for whose benefit guide books, itineraries and collections of inscriptions, called *Syllogae*, had been written had been gradually destroyed, blocked up and forgotten. Consequently it was assumed during the next five hundred years that all the famous Popes and martyrs had been buried in the *Coemeterium ad Catacumbas*, and so the name "Catacomb" was given to all those that were rediscovered from the sixteenth century right down to our own day and is still the name by which they are popularly known. In the fifteenth century an Archbishop of Bourges put an inscription at the entrance to the *Coemeterium ad Catacumbas* in which he stated that this was the cemetery of Callixtus, and that 174,000 martyrs had been buried in it, including the famous martyr Caecilia, the Virgin Lucina, and forty-eight Popes. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that De Rossi demonstrated that this was a mistake. The cemetery of Callixtus, the first public burial place of the Roman Church, where many Popes had been buried from the third century onwards, was not under the Church of St. Sebastian, although it was not far from it. This he proved by the discovery of many inscriptions and also of *graffiti* or scratchings made on the walls by pilgrims who come to pray at the tombs of the martyrs or Popes who were buried in this cemetery.

On the walls of this room inscriptions of an illiterate character had been scratched both in Latin and Greek either involving the prayers of Peter and Paul, or stating that a memorial banquet (called *Refrigerium*) had been celebrated in their honour.

The following are specimens of these *graffiti*:

DALMATIVS BOTVM IS PROMISIT REFRIGERIVM[1]

PETRVS ET PAVLVS IN MENTE ABEATIS ANTONIVM BASSVM . . . NIVS ET IN MENTE ABETE GALASIVS[2]

PAVLE PETRE IN MENTE HABETE SOZOMENON ET TV QVI LEGIS.[3]

PETRE ET PAVLE PETITE PRO VICTORE[4]

These *graffiti* prove that the persons who made them regarded this place as being near either the actual or former sepulchre of the apostles, for funeral banquets were only celebrated near tombs. This was a pagan custom taken over by the Christians. A room specially built for the celebration of such banquets may be seen in the street of tombs at Pompeii, and there is also one in the cemetery of Domitilla, the Christian niece of Vespasian, which is quite close to this room.

It has been suggested that the villa which once stood on the site now occupied by the Church of St. Sebastian may have belonged to a Christian, and served as a place of refuge for the apostles during the persecution. (We read in the story of the death of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, which is certainly genuine, that he retired to a country villa when he was in danger of arrest.) This would account for the inscription DOMVS PETRI.

When Pope Damasus restored the cemeteries and set up his inscriptions in them, he deliberately made many of them very vague in meaning, because the traditions relating to those who were buried near his inscriptions were so uncertain, as we have already mentioned. The inscription which he set up in the Platonia was more vague than usual. It begins:

> Hic habitasse prius sanctos cognoscere debes
> Nomina quisque Petri pariterque Paulique requiris.[5]

[1] "Dalmatius a vow. He promised a banquet."
[2] "Peter and Paul have in mind Antonius Bassus . . . and have in mind Gelasius."
[3] "Paul and Peter have Sozomenos in mind and you who read."
[4] "Peter and Paul pray for Victor."
[5] "Here you must know that the saints once dwelt. Their names, if you ask, were Peter and Paul."

The natural interpretation of these lines is that the apostles once lived here, not that they were buried here, but the rest of the inscription is so obscure and has given rise to such fantastic interpretations, that no reliance can be placed on the meaning of any part of it. It is, however, not impossible that if the apostles took refuge in the villa that once existed on this site and even went forth from it to their deaths, their bodies might have been brought back here for temporary burial until their tombs had been made ready near the places where they had been executed. Some such explanation of the existence of the Platonia with its double empty tomb in the middle, the sanctity attached to it and the inscriptions found on the site promising a memorial banquet seems to be required.

Another very curious discovery has recently been made under the Church of St. Sebastian. This is a staircase which leads from the tavern to a narrow passage deep in the ground which ends in a well, which well apparently once opened up in the Church. Its upper part is now blocked and its existence had been forgotten. One part of this passage had been covered with a ring of stucco on the lower part of which some inscriptions had been scratched, one of which was as follows: "Peter and Paul have Primus in mind, and Saturnia the wife of the son of Primus, and Victorinus her father, for ever." This was followed by the sacred monogram.

It is plain that this section of the passage was regarded as a holy place. Under the floor was a small hollow, the use of which had never been discovered, but it must have been of some importance, for the inscriptions are placed as near to it as possible in a very inconvenient position.

No obvious reason can be given for the construction of this passage. It has been suggested that it was made in a time of persecution when the cemeteries were confiscated, in order that pilgrims might approach the former resting place of the apostles without being seen. It is not likely that the tavern from which the passage led would be confiscated, or even regarded with suspicion.

The fact that it led to the lower part of a well which once opened into the Church is interesting. In Severano's *Le sette chiese di Roma*, written in 1630, there is a long and confused account of the burial of the apostles on the Appian Way, and this is always connected with a well. Severano may have been acquainted with the appearance of the church before it was

altered to its present condition some twenty years before the date of his book.

In certain ancient paintings which once existed in the portico of St. Peter's Church the hiding of the bodies of the apostles on the Appian Way and their subsequent removal are represented. In these pictures they are depicted both being lowered into a well and taken up from it again. Rough copies of these pictures were preserved in Antonio Bosio's *Roma Sotterranea* (1632). They were certainly painted before the removal of the well head in the Church of St. Sebastian.

It is possible that the well head was a place of pilgrimage after the passage leading to the lower part of the well had been blocked or flooded. There is a similar well head in the church of St. Praxedis at Rome, but the story attached to that is quite different.

The tombs discovered in the deep hollow under the Church of St. Sebastian were cut in the face of the cliff. They were most elaborately decorated and afford one more proof that members of some wealthy families became Christians. One had the name Marcus Clodius Hermes cut in the lintel of the door, which probably proves that the owner was a freedman of the family of the Clodii. The proof that the owner of one of the tombs was a Christian is found in the word *ἰχθύς* cut in Greek characters with the letter *tau* between the first and second letters. The word *ἰχθύς* is the well-known acrostic of the words *Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτήρ* ("Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour"), and the *tau* was a symbol of the cross. There is also a Greek inscription which may be translated: "Gaius Ancotius Epaphroditus to his wife Ancotia Irene and Gaius Ancotius Rufus and Gaius Ancotius Rufinus to their beloved mother, a lover of God, a lover of widows, a lover of her husband, a lover of her children, to keep her in mind." The fish symbol and an anchor were also carved on the slab. These are well-known Christian symbols.

VII. CONCLUSION

An attempt has here been made to give an objective account of the results of excavations, some of them recent, on or near the sites connected by tradition with the name of St. Peter, and of the documentary evidence which bears on them. Matters which are in dispute and theories founded on them have been deliberately omitted.

The only evidence available until lately about excavations round the actual tomb of St. Peter on the Vatican is to be found in the manuscript of Ubaldi already referred to, which is worthy of much longer treatment and more careful study than can be given to it here. Since 1941 further excavations have been carried out under St. Peter's, and we await a full account of their results.[1]

Much has been written about the excavations under the Church of St. Sebastian, and many contradictory theories have been put forward to explain the discoveries there made. One thing is certain. The site on the Appian Way was regarded with great reverence from an early date, and this reverence was inspired by a belief either that the apostles had lived there, or been temporarily buried there, or both. The Church of the Apostles, which was built there after the peace of the Church, was honoured with the churches on the Vatican and the Ostian Way in a special festival which is mentioned in a hymn attributed to St. Ambrose:

> Tantae per urbis ambitum
> Stipata tendunt agmina;
> Trinis celebratur viis
> Festum sacrorum martyrum.[2]

The monumental and literary evidence summarised above leaves no reasonable doubt that St. Peter came to Rome some time or other, and was put to death in the persecution of Nero or soon after. It makes it probable that he had more to do with the Church in Rome than could possibly be done in a short visit just before his death. It proves that his memory was highly honoured at Rome, even more than that of St. Paul, from an early period. It is significant that the theology of the First Epistle of St. Peter made a deeper impression on the Roman Church than the theology of the Epistle to the Romans. This, as far as we can judge, was not understood or appreciated at Rome. There is not a trace of it in the *Epistle* of Clement of

[1 An interesting and well-documented account of the results of recent excavation on the Vatican hill, so far as they were allowed to be divulged at the time, was contributed by R. T. O'Callaghan to *The Biblical Archaeologist*, xii. (1949), pp. 1 ff. One of these results is that the commonly held view that the three southern walls of Constantine's basilica rested on the three northern walls of Nero's circus is shown to be wrong. Newly discovered inscriptional evidence indicates that the circus is in the vicinity; but its exact location has not yet been identified, nor is it certain that it was oriented due east and west. It is announced that further details of recent discoveries are to be published shortly in a book by G. Kirschbaum, a member of the archaeological commission which has been conducting the excavations.—ED.]

[2 "The close-pressed throngs hold the circuit of so great a city: the feast of the holy martyrs is celebrated on three ways."

Rome or in the *Shepherd* of Hermas. It seems that its full meaning was never appreciated by anyone before the time of St. Augustine, and he was not a Roman. Even with his advocacy, it failed to make any distinctive impression on the theology of the Roman Church, and this is still true.

The later monumental evidence only confirms what we already knew from literary sources, that the Bishops of Rome soon began to make extravagant claims for the supremacy of their see, and that they based these claims on their succession from the apostle to whom the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven had been given and who had been commanded to feed the flock of Christ.

The evidence here given confirms the truth of a series of historical events, but not the truth of a dogma. While we reject the dogma, there is no reason why we should reject the historical facts on which it was supposed to be founded.

The refusal to give due weight to such evidence leads to general historical scepticism which is founded on nothing better than theological or philosophical presuppositions. Its pernicious working is seen in the frantic efforts made by some critics to prove, in spite of excellent documentary evidence to the contrary, that the Apostle John never was at Ephesus. This they try to do in the hope that by so doing they may show that it is impossible that he should have written the fourth Gospel. If we do not follow them in their scepticism as to the presence of St. John at Ephesus, we are not justified in using similar methods to prove that St. Peter never went to Rome, because we desire " a short and easy way " of refuting the Papal claims.

These must be dealt with on quite other grounds. It is easy to trace their growth and the resistance which was made to them, even in the meagre literature which has come down to us from the first Christian centuries. A theory which rests on interpolations in the writings of Cyprian, on the *Donation of Constantine* and on the *Forged Decretals* does not need to be undermined by a refusal to accept evidence which is supported by almost contemporary literature and by the results of excavations begun in the sixteenth century and continued until the present day, which results have never been rendered doubtful, still less refuted, by monumental evidence coming from any other place.

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