

CHAPTER XLIII

ROME AGAIN

The whole party was reunited in Rome. The Edgcombs (Mr., Mrs. and Ervin) came in by sleeper from Venice while the airplane party (Grandfather, Grandmother, Grace, Miss Kavanaugh and Miss Shield) arrived by sleeper from Brindisi. It was the first time in Rome for the Edgcombs, also for Miss Kavanaugh, who spent a considerable part of her stay in arranging and carrying out an audience with the Pope. It was the second visit for Grace and Miss Shield, the third for Grandmother and the sixth for Grandfather. But what matter if it were the sixth.

Again we should be held awe-bound by Michael Angelo's overpowering ceiling - again we should enjoy Raphael's Mt. Parnassus and the School of Athens, and the Liberation of Peter, again we should view his Sybils in Santa Marie della Pace, again we should see the Apollo Belvidere and Michael Angelo's Moses, again we should trod the pavements of the Forum where once walked the mighty Caesar; again when tired by the ruins of Hadrian's villa, we should be rested by the refreshing fountains of Tivoli, and this time Grandfather planned to take a day off to play in the Alban Mountains - the playground of Romans of all times.

On Lake Nemi, two houseboats of the Emperor Tiberius sunk, Mussolini had been lowering the level of the lake to recover them. The probability of discovery of consequential importance on these boats seemed slight, but at least the effort appealed to the imagination. We went on a church holiday (the Assumption of the Virgin Mary) and as we reached the Alban Mountains at Rocca di Papa, encountered a procession of monks and priests, and children gaily attired as angels. The procession with its banners made a colorful picture.

Lake Alban was beautiful, the breeze in the hill was refreshing, and as we stopped for lunch, having brought our lunch with us, and spread it out on tables provided for picknickers, a local musician amused us by playing a curious one-stringed instrument. It had a round resonant chamber looking quite like a toy balloon attached to a long stick. This home-made contraption he held like a cello and played on it with a bow.

One of the Emperor Tiberius' boats had been pulled out of the lake, the location of the other was marked by a row boat. The best things from the boat which had been recovered we might have seen easily at the Muse della Terme, very near to our hotel, the Quirinal, but it seemed more like getting close to modern archeological research to go to Lake Nemi.

The auto road from the hilltop to the lake was closed in honor of the church holiday, but archeological endeavor always has been accompanied by much pain to the flesh, so let's walk down. What did we see when we got down? Not much - on the way we had passed a bit of old Roman pavement and at the bottom we could see a hundred yards away, under a tent, the stern of Tiberius' boat. Under a shed we might inspect at close range the bronze head which adorned the prow and, somewhat entertaining but not especially attractive, a couple of cords of antique wood which had broken off in pulling the boat out of the lake.

Grandfather arrived back out of breath, resolving next time to be content to view Lake Nemi from the hilltop, while the others professed to believe that even if they had not learned much, the climb had been good exercise.

No entertaining incident marked the trip to Rome, but the weather was fine, Miss Kavanaugh saw the Pope, the Edgcombs had caught a glimpse of the world's most interesting city. Grace and Grandfather stole away from

the party for half a day to rouse the vergers of obscure little churches seldom visited by a tourist. Those who had previously been in Rome reviewed again the pleasures of previous trips and all threw a coin into Fontana del Trevi with a wish that they might again see the Eternal City.