

APPENDIX B

PAGANISM AND CHRISTIANITY

An Address Delivered by Grandfather in 1908

At the end of the ancient Roman Forum rises the enormous ruins of the Colosseum. Below is an elongated circle of lofty arches, one-third of a mile in circumference, above this a second story of similar arches, above this a third story also of arches, and then a fourth story of solid masonry. But not only because of its vast size is the Colosseum impressive - but also because of its ornamentation. The exterior is adorned with columns placed between the arches - Doric on the first story, Ionic on the second, Corinthian on the third, while the flat masonry of the top story is enriched with Corinthian pilasters.

Around the top is a row of ornamented sockets in which were placed masts to stretch a silken canopy over the vast structure. At the west end of the ellipse is a wide entrance through which triumphal processions could pass in imposing array from the Forum to the Arena. At the opposite end was an entrance for gladiators.

Through a doorway in the north side, the Vestal Virgins and high officials might enter from the city and through the opposite doorway the Emperor with his suite came from his great palace on the nearby Palatine to witness the games.

From every fourth archway rose a staircase by which the populace might ascend, the wealthier to the marble galleries, the poor to the wooden seated gallery above, while the impecunious rabble sought standing room on a topmost platform.

From these seats the vast assemblage of eighty thousand spectators looked down upon a sanded arena whose greater diameter (287 feet) was about the length of a city block. About the arena ran a wall and to guard against the possible chance of a tiger leaping through this barrier its top was fitted with a roller that would turn and throw the beast back into the arena. Under the great structure were training quarters for the gladiators, hospitals for the wounded, and morgues for the dead. Here also was an elaborate equipment of stage apparatus by which cages could be hoisted through trap doors and the wild beasts discharged into the arena.

But, alas, the structure has been wrecked, partly by the ravages of time - more by the vandalism of men. For centuries it served as an inexhaustible quarry for the mediaeval church builders. They dug out every iron clamp that bound its great stones together, they carried off all its costly marble seats. Two-thirds of the great structure they carried away, yet so vast was the structure that \$2,500,000 of building material still remains piled up into the most imposing ruin of the world.

Half the Arena has crumbled away revealing the stone chambers beneath - the other half still remains - the seats are gone, but the great stone supports mark their place. On one side the exterior wall rises only three stories, but on the other preserves its full height.

In the glare of noonday the Colosseum is the picture of destruction and desolation, but under the mellow rays of the full moon peeping over the great wall, the scene seems changed - one's imagination can again put back the seats of glittering marbles and in the dark shadows of the Arena seem to see a stealthy lion crouching to spring upon his prey.

As one stands in the Arena on a moonlight night, a multitude of reflections crowd upon him. One's thoughts go back to the primitive and harmless ideals of early paganism.

The early Greek personified phenomena of nature. The sky became Zeus, the father of Gods and men, the atmosphere was Hera, his wife, the wind was Hermes and the broad sea was Poseiden. Abstract ideas also were personified - Athena was the personification of womanly wisdom and Ares the spirit of martial conflict.

This worship was not devoid of admirable qualities. In Apollo the all seeing God of the Sun, before whom no dark thoughts could stand and in his sister Artemis, the moon goddess, the embodiment of womanly virtue we may see pagan ideals at their best, but even at their best, these numberless gods and goddesses were only big men and women - big in stature, perfect in physical form but with all the frailties and passions of mortals. The pagan world in short worshipped physical perfection and never rose to an appreciation of spiritual beauty.

In their effort to attain this ideal of physical perfection, it was natural that encouragement should be given to manly sports and that it should be considered pleasing to the gods to hold athletic contest in their honor. Thus at Olympia, once in four years all Greeks laid aside their arms and by friendly contest gave worship to Zeus - so, too, the Athenians, once in four years, in their own city held a big athletic meet and then in long procession as we may see them portrayed in Phidias' famous frieze, ascended the Acropolis, bearing a new robe to their patron goddess Athena, as personified in the gold and ivory statue standing in the inner cella of the Parthenon.

Athletic games in antiquity had a religious significance, but to what a strange religious ceremony Roman games degenerated. Ancestors, too, were deified and athletic games were often held to commemorate funeral ceremonies.

In 264 B.C. two Roman youths, to do special honor at the funeral of their father, borrowed an Etruscan custom and hired two gladiators to fight

in arms. Among the Greeks such a thing would have been an abomination for their sense of propriety would permit not even a mimic death on their tragic stage - but to the brutal, unimaginative Roman here was a form of amusement after his own heart.

Gladiatorial games appealed to his love of martial conflict and they required no imagination. Here he could actually see the blood flow and hear the real death groans.

So gladiatorial contest grew in popularity until no theater was large enough to hold the crowds. Then some architectural genius suggested that two theaters be built face to face so that the seats should form a circle surrounding an elliptical arena. Soon every important Roman city had one of these double theaters or amphitheaters, to use the Roman term. Finally at Rome there was erected the largest of them all, which either from its own colossal size or from a colossal statue of Nero that stood nearby, was called the Colosseum. Vespasian dedicated it with games lasting one hundred days, in which 5,000 wild beasts were slain. But even this extravagant display was eclipsed by the Emperor Trajan, who gave games in which 10,000 armed gladiators fought and more than 10,000 wild beasts were slain. But even this wild carnage did not satiate the growing thirst for blood. Unarmed men and helpless women were huddled together in the arena, doors were thrown open and upon them sprang tigers, maddened by hunger, to rend and devour them before the eyes of the delighted spectators.

These wretched men and women were guilty of no crime - they had lived virtuous lives but they were Christians. The Romans were usually tolerant of other religions - so tolerant that they themselves erected an altar to the unknown God, but upon the Christians they finally turned with fury, determined to exterminate the little sect.

The reason for this unusual art of religious persecution was this. The Romans deified not only phenomena of nature and abstract ideas but also deified their emperors. In the Forum may be found not only a Portico to the Twelve Great Gods but also a temple to the Divine Vespasian and another to the Divine Antoninus. Now had the Christians merely wished to add one more deity to this already overcrowded company of Gods, the Romans would have made no objection. But the Christians insisted that their God was the only true God and refused to pay even the most formal worship to the deified emperors.

Thus, they seemed not only guilty of impiety toward the Roman Gods but even traitors to the Roman State, by their obstinacy setting an example of rebellion to all subject nations and by their impiety bringing down the wrath of the Roman Gods upon the state. So they must be exterminated. While some were thrown to the beasts of the arena, others smeared with pitch were burned as torches to light the emperor's gardens.

But long past is all the struggle; empty and bare is the great Colosseum and as the moon in the stillness of the night lights up the great arches, the huge building seems a great sepulcher and there comes the thought that this is indeed hallowed ground - hallowed by the Christian martyrs who here met death rather than deny their God.

Our thoughts turn from the suffering of the martyrs to follow the refugees out on the Appian way and into the catacombs. We think how on the yesterday with lighted candles in hand we had descended into the subterranean passage ways which the early Christians had hewn through the soft tufa rock.

On either side are niches for the dead - here a tiny one for a babe - there a larger one for an entire family. Occasionally the passage widens out into a small square chamber containing an altar and lined with

niches containing illustrious dead - a martyred bishop, a saint, an honored Pope.

Miles of such passages in labyrinthine curves surround the city of Rome and into this trackless maze the Christians fled from persecution. That man could have lived in the darkness, dampness and suffocation of those unventilated passages seems incredible. Easier it would seem to face the devouring tigers of the arena than to meet the slower but scarcely less certain death of the catacombs. Yet the numerous inscriptions and paintings in the catacomb walls tell no story of suffering and despair, but the story of Christian hope. Nowhere is the crucifixion portrayed but everywhere Christ is pictured as the Good Shepherd.

The story of Jonah is pictured to suggest the resurrection and flowing water to suggest the bounty of God and the saving power of baptism. These paintings, to be sure, are no great works of art - how could they be when painted hastily on wet, mud-like stone in the light of a dimly burning candle - yet they are not without artistic effect. The little square chambers are decorated with geometrical designs, marking them off symmetrically, and in the open squares are pictures of Christ the good shepherd and the phoenix, symbol of everlasting life.

So life here, after all, was not cheerless, but in this most dismal of all human abodes, there was a spirit that should put to shame any twentieth century complainant.

A prayer meeting in one of these little chambers must have breathed with a spirit of hopefulness and optimism, but do you suppose that any wild dreamer ever ventured to prophesy that in yonder Roman piazza, on Marcus Amelius's great marble shaft, the statue of Antoninus should be replaced by a likeness of their own Saint Paul and that Trojan's bronze column too

should hold aloft for the admiration of men not a Roman Emperor but a Gallilean fisherman - that from the niches of the Pantheon, Zeus, Minerva and all the pagan dieties should be expelled and that there with Christian ceremony should be buried Kings of Italy that made not the slightest pretensions to the titles or prerogatives of the Caesars - that from the great Mausoleum of Hadrian, the dust of the Caesars should be thrown to the winds of heaven and over the empty tomb should stand a Christian archangel pointing to a nearby Christian cathedral vastly larger and more imposing than any pagan temple ever erected - that the Colosseum itself should no longer echo with the shouts of a pagan multitude but on a moonlight Sunday night in the far away centuries should be filled with Christian song, sung by Christian visitors from a Christian land beyond the unknown sea.

No! the wildest dreamer of the catacombs could dream no such dream as that. Yet all this has come to pass. Pagan Rome is gone - not a building, scarcely a monument of the ancient city stands today except such as have been dedicated to the service of the Christian Church and because of that dedication have been preserved by the Christian Church. Paganism is dead, Christianity has triumphed. Many are the contrasts between Paganism and Christianity, but with all the differences, pagan Rome and the Christian Church were alike in at least one thing - each stood for world conquest, but what a difference in the world conquest.

While Roman world conquest meant the subjection of narrow circle of nations around the Mediterranean - Christian world conquest means the carrying of conviction to every human being in the globe - to the hermit savage on an out-of-the-way island of the tropical Pacific and to the Laplander driving his reindeer over the ice floes of the Arctic Zone.

And how different the messages brought by the two conquests! The

Roman Message said "Obey Caesar, pay tribute to Caesar." Let us not utterly deny this Roman message, for it often brought order out of chaos and carried civilization to barbarians - but it was at best a harsh message - a message that meant oppressive taxation, perhaps bloodshed and enslavement! The Christian message, on the contrary, says: "God is love. He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son who died upon the cross that all that believeth in him might not die but should have eternal life." Pagan religions were race religions. Greek gods smiled only upon those of a Greek descent - the Roman in sacrificing wrapped his head in cloth lest his eye might fall upon a foreigner and the service be thereby spoiled, but Christianity is a world religion - it is for all men - it proclaimed that all men, irrespective of race, color, or social standing are brothers to be bound together not by the iron chains of governmental force but by the strong ties of brotherly affection.

"While stands the Colosseum, Rome shall stand,
When falls the Colosseum, Rome shall fall,
And when Rome falls, with it shall fall the World."

So ran an ancient pilgrim prophesy - half true, half false. When fell the Colosseum then indeed fell pagan Rome - the Rome of Caesarism, of slavery, of vice - but when Pagan Rome fell, the world did not fall with it, but arose the stronger, the freer, the purer. I grant that the world is not yet perfect, though slavery is abolished. Poorly requited toil and consequent misery still exist, sin and vice have by no means disappeared, but that the Christian world is better than the cruel world of paganism is so self-evident that it would be only a waste of time to demonstrate it. To one who reads history it is equally self-evident that the Christian world is constantly proving better and that the world today is better than it ever has been. Never has there been a time when the world was so keenly awake to

moral influences, never a time when it was so hazardous for a man with an immoral record to raise himself in public life - never a time when the cry for help at either our own door or in farthest lands met with such bountiful charity.

The progress of the world toward freedom from vice seems at times, I grant, provokingly slow, but when we think back at what was accomplished by the little band of Christians hiding in the darkness of the catacombs - how their constancy and virtue converted even the Emperor himself - how one day a Christian monk rushing between the gladiators in the Colosseum by the sacrifice of his own life ended the bloody scenes of the arena - how they transformed pagan Rome, the vortex of luxurious vice into Christian Rome - a beacon radiating light to the world, when we think what seemingly impossible marvels this little band accomplished, may we not hope that the Christian church with its millions of men and women and great resources inspired by the same great Master that stood with the martyr in the arena and comforted the widow in the depths of the catacombs, shall yet complete the task of reclaiming the world and that the citadel of vice shall fall as fell the Colosseum and some day through their ruins may resound the song of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.