the whole geology of the Roman Campagna, when these fields were still the Phlegraean

7I have always trembled, as at the edge of a bottomless abyss, at the faint traces of a higher antiquity than that which the soon-extinguished torch of history illuminates — traces which, especially in Italy, and preeminently in the environs of Rome, are not infrequent. To these belong the name Janiculum, the very ancient name of the Capitoline Hill: Saturnia. The way this sense of presentiment was heightened and confirmed, when the first news reached me of the wonderful grave vessels and funerary urns which were discovered a year and a half ago on what was to me the very familiar seacoast between Castel-Gandolfo and Marino, can hardly be described. They were found during excavation for a new road, at first under layers of puzzolana and peperino; but peperino is a lavabrecesa [sic], hard enough to be used to make doorposts, steps and window-frames, as is done everywhere in these regions. At first there arose the prosaic doubt about everything, of which nothing, or nothing definite permitting calculation, has been written, even against this voice of the primeval world sounding out of the graves. But it became more and more evident that these very numerous (already more than 1,000) receptacles, funerary urns containing human ashes and bones, were not thrust in under the puzzolan masses which often extended over the cliff walls and were hardened to tuff, but were found sheltered by them. The following most recent news from Rome completely contradicts that limited view whereby, because amber pellets are found in the receptacles, and because the form is similar to that of other nations, they are declared to be remnants of a Germanic military corps encamped on these shores in very well-known times.* My daughter thus wrote me [in quoting] from the letter of a friend in 1818: “Tell your mother that I have now at last seen for myself the vases which interest her so much. There are over 1,000 of them, with large and small ones intermingled. The large principal container (probably of each grave), the one that held the ashes, always has the form of a hut, a hut to be lived in (and, judging by the sketch I have in my hands, exactly the form of the huts still used by the shepherds in the Campagna for preparing milk concoctions and cheese). One single one has the shape of a helmet. I am not learned enough to decide whether these vessels originated in a prehistoric antiquity which our imagination can scarcely reach. But I do know that the sight of them deeply moved me. Similar vases are still being found on that side of the Alban Lake between Castel-Gandolfo and Marino; when they are making Skassati (what they call Skassati is when new vineyards are being planted, making it necessary to dig very deeply into the ground before reaching the necessary depth), they find layers of peperino: they break through these and find underneath them the large containers (which are the actual grave) that contain these vases. Among them the undamaged ones are those that stood in the large clay receptacles, which have exactly the now usual form of the large oil vessels they call Vettine. The clay work on these vases is remarkably unfinished. The small metal objects that have been found in them, such as little rings, lances, shields, are far more finished in their workmanship.”**

Thus far our friend (Caroline Baroness von Humboldt, née von Dachröden) in 1818. I later received the protocol which the numerous witnesses of this interesting discovery had taken — laborers on the road work and the vineyard plantation, landowners, engineer officers on the highway construction, etc. — according to which the 2 ½ foot high containers (the actual grave which contained the ash-pots, Pateren, wine and oil jars, and a kind of little artificial vessels to exude a good odor) were found beneath layers of peperino baked together with hardened tuff (as
ones, and when the fiery throats, from Civita-Vecchia in the west as far as the heights [p. 38] of Bolsena, and on the other side from Velletri to the border of the Pontine Marshes in the [p. 39] south, then over the Alban and Algidus as far as over the valley of Palestrina, the glowing streams poured themselves, and all these high fire-ovens threw out the land on which Rome should one day rule the world; — when the whole broad Campagna was at first only a lava-, ash- and cinder desert, the lakes of Bolsena, Monterosi, Viterbo, of Nemi and the quiet mirror of Albano [were] flaming abysses, and the immortal Seven Hills [were] lava and pizzolana banks.

* In Marino we got into our carriage to drive to Rocca di Papa, from which we were about three-quarters of a mile distant, and whose wasps’ nest we could already see, hanging gray on gray, in Læstrigonian size, with the aid of a concave mirror. But a very ancient magic forest still lay between us and our rocky goal. On the gently rising, vineyard-shaded open [p. 40] way, I rejoiced to see it so well arranged, the enclosures so well maintained, and the living hedges so well trimmed and kept so neat, as is necessary if they are to answer to their purpose. We soon reached the deeply shadowed, somewhat awe-inspiring chestnut wood, expecting as little trouble from it as the brave Rinaldo; “pieno d’orrore” it did seem to us, “ma del orror natio!”* But this dread primeval grove surrounds the summit of the Alban mountain on all sides. We could still see beneath the branches of the trees the fruitful valley delle Moline, which divides the mountain chain into its two sections, the old Algids and Alban mountain, whose summit is now called Monte-Cavo. On this side lay the towns of Albano, Castel-Gandolfo, Larcia, Nemi, Genzano, Marino, Rocca di Papa and, on the site of the former Alba-Longa, the cloister of Palazzola; on the other [side] the abbacy of Grotta-Ferrata, Frascati, Rocca-Priora and Monte-Compiatri, which [?] was the old Municipium of Tusculum. Alba-Longa, Nemi, Larcia fought [p. 41] with Rome, and at the Ferentine spring in Marino there assembled the representatives of the Federation of the old Latin League, whose tutelary god was the Jupiter of the Alban mountain and its capital, Alba-Longa.* How full of life was this old Latium, how full of healthy youthful developmental force, before the She-wolf arose and began a long struggle, from which Latium, as such, never recovered and in which it suffered irretrievably, the old peaceful alliance of the 31 Latin cities! And before the Latin people, before the Saturnian empire (whose founders, with the harvesting sickle, were probably fleeing threatening natural occurrences on the coasts of Asia Minor in order to found a peaceful community in this quiet out-of-the-way land), — who were you, you

so often in these regions) which were two to three feet deep and extended for a quite uncertain distance over the fields, since there is almost everywhere around here a rocky base, which they break through in part (and can do so, since a lava-peperino-tuff shell is often only a few feet deep, under which can be found another layer of earth where the vines can take root) to use it for the grapevines. This being proved and admitted, that the volcanic activity of this mountain chain, whose principal parts in antiquity were called the Alban Mountain and the Algidus, have outlasted all history, how can it be doubted that through this chance discovery [we have been put] in possession of the oldest remains of the human race, in the ancient Saturnia. (Written in 1819.)

*“Dreadful indeed, but full of its own inborn terror.” Words from the Gerusalemme liberata, 18th Canto.
original inhabitants, whose ashes rest beneath the later peperino layers which themselves antedate all myths? But here no plumb-line of scientific reasoning is sufficient, and only fancy soars with extended wings above the immeasurable grave which the creating and destroying Isis prepares for the entering and vanishing races of mankind.

Lost in similar reflections, even [p. 42] Bonstetten had not noticed that our Roman coachman did not know the way, and, mistaking the rain channels hollowed out in the soft volcanic tuff-stone for the actual route, was driving us hither and yon through the broad forest. Now we mistook the smoke of the charcoal pile for cabin-smoke, now the ring of the murderous lumber axe for the announcer of domestic life; but the grove grew steadily darker, and though we caught occasional glimpses through the treetops of Rocca di Papa on its cliff, basking in the afternoon sun, while we turned about in the labyrinth of perplexity, the one way which leads to the cliff nest, which we saw clearly enough to observe the bustle of a market in the dependent streets, failed to present itself. The coachman, impassioned by the shame of having got lost (after his assurance that he knew all these routes), cursed and ground his teeth, and finally declared that he did not know the way at all and was here for the first time in his life. Bonstetten had just gone to look for the right way when we (Ida and I) discovered a steep footpath, which, however, feeble I felt unable to climb. Now the coachman declared that he would climb up and [p. 43] bring a donkey so that we could reach the town. It looked so near that I let him go, since Bonstetten after all must return at any moment. Now Ida and I were quite alone in the wide, millennia-old, horrid grove. Slowly there arose in us memories of so many deeds of robbery and murder which hunger and privation had brought to pass in this very autumn, and of which we every day received often exaggerated accounts from every side, so that nobody went about unarmed; and ah, Bonstetten did not come back, however yearningly we made his name resound through the grove as loudly as we could. Only a broken echo answered us in detached syllables.

It was already between four and five in the afternoon, and the shadows were beginning to lengthen. My sweet Ida in loving childishness concealed her anxiety from me. She was then in her tenth year, and a piano teacher (I did not wish to let the healthy but delicate girl learn singing as yet) had already discovered the treasure of heavenly euphony that was hidden in the young breast, but he secretly practiced only little folk songs. Suddenly Ida said: “Do you know something, Mummy? [p. 44] If the robbers come, I will sing so beautifully that they certainly won’t kill us.” This instinctive awareness, the childish hope and the really alarming situation in which we found ourselves, brought tears to my eyes, together with a smile to my cheeks. The most painful thing was that I could not move; for the coachman had given me the reins, and I could not entrust them to Ida. I also found it necessary to avoid with care every noise; for we now heard in several quarters voices of the popular troops returning from the market. We also saw from above all sorts of riffraff losing themselves in the wood. Now it began to grow really dark around us in the deep wood; purplish lights shone on the old tree trunks and fell in gentle gradations as though dying out through the dark perspectives of the grove, where yellow-white trunks, severed stumps and isolated rock masses produced fantastical appearances. And still the accursed Rocca di Papa, now lit up by the sunset, hung down from
above us in deceptive proximity, like one of those enchanted castles which flee away before the exhausted wanderer, [p. 45] or like a dream story in which the sleeper, bound in indissoluble fetters, is unable to approach the object of his desire by even a hair’s breadth.

While we sat there, a prey to all the pangs of uncertainty, there comes a well-dressed man some distance away, proceeding sidewise from Marino and seemingly following a transverse path straight through the woods. He too notices us from a distance in the gathering twilight and comes to us. The good man quite froze in his wonderment: “Ma Signora come mai siete venuta qui?” he cried in astonishment. We told him our story. He said to us: “The coachman is very quiet in the tavern of Rocca di Papa and having a drink! I live there and [will] hurry up there in order to drive him down; for truly you are not safe here!” Now we said to him, our friend is also missing and, as we are bound to fear, lost; to which he quickly replied: “Che Dio l’aiuti,” and hurried sideways up the cliff.

Our anxiety for ourselves was now fairly well [p. 46] allayed, for the proximity of Rocca di Papa, and the eagerness the good man had shown, gave us the assurance of the coachman’s speedy return. But now began the equally painful anxiety for our friend, who certainly would not allow himself to be held up in the tavern of Rocca di Papa and must therefore undoubtedly have got lost in the deep woods.

In fact the coachman soon arrived, but, as we had feared, alone, and excusing his prolonged absence [by saying] that he had vainly sought Herr von Bonstetten throughout the town and just as vainly asked for him. The uneasiness of this man concerning him was unmistakable. He tried as quickly as possible to get out of the wood and onto the highroad to Marino, and now we almost flew into the little town, where I knew a family. We stopped before their house and did not rest until some men on horseback were on their way to the wood with torches to free the wanderer. With beating heart we hurried farther. Between Marino and Castel-Gandolfo we were finally relieved of our anxiety, for there Bonstetten’s Jean came to meet us (we had left him behind, as being useless in a foreign land): “Monsieur est à la [p. 47] maison,” was his first word, and truly a very reassuring one. “Il m’a envoyé au-devant de ces Dames pour les tranquilliser.” We rejoiced that our carefree friend had so rightly guessed our care for him, and inquired further about the adventure he had survived. He too had got lost in the magic wood, but far from Rocca di Papa in its darkest part, and in wandering and searching in the failing light had got onto a lonely wood path. Here he had soon encountered a Capuchin brother from the cloister at Palazzola, [who,] no less astonished by his appearance in the infamous wood at this hour than the good man from over there [had been] by our appearance, had brought him to Palazzola by the short footpath on that side of the lake — from where our lost defender had gone back to Albano by himself and enjoyed the luncheon which had now become dinner, confidently hoping that we would enjoy [the help of] the fortunate star which had lighted

9 “How in the world did you get here?”

10 “God help him.”
him.

Freed from our anxiety concerning him, we could now peacefully enjoy the splendid view which had opened up around us. On the free hill-ridge between Marino and Castel-Gandolfo [p. 48] there still remained a splendid, magnificent late red in all the glory of these airs. The grove of Marino was woven through with brownish gold, and all its picturesque treetops and ivy wreaths seemed alive in the deep gloaming. The noble Castel-Gandolfo threw a gigantic shadow crosswise over the lake onto the high bank of Palazzola. The summit of the Alban mountain stood out red in the darkling glow, but the lake seemed at every moment to sink deeper into the shadows; and ah, high above the terraced lake shore and out of the magic forest, the unattainable Rocca di Papa rose boldly from its lava cliff in the half-dying evening light. In clear heavenly blue, beyond the vale of Palestrina, lay the ridge of Tivoli, the lined-up hills of the Sabine land and the isolated Soracte; more darkly blued, the receding hill-ranks of Viterbo, Montefiascone, and finally the tall primeval volcano of Radicofani; the sea still glowed azure-blue beneath the flaming hearth of the already vanished sun, and beside us the young moon floated above the deep sea of shadows.11 A colorful herd of goats, more variegated [p. 49] in the evening light, animated this magic painting, accompanied by the bagpipe-like playing of the herd-boys. Thus idyllically, the knot of anxiety that had constrained our heart was loosened in the enjoyment of the most beautiful evening hour. Cheerful and still, we rolled through the millenaries-old grove-vault of the alley of Castel-Gandolfo, greeted the well-known seats in front of the Franciscan cloister, waved a goodnight to the deeply resting lake, and found in Albano our safe and sound friend.

Trip from Frascati via Monte-Porcio to Rome.

When we inquired here [in Frascati] for the residence of the abdicated King of Sardinia, they were not able to give it to us offhand, and it was only when, accompanied by our hired servant, we looked up the little house at the end of the town which I occupied with you in 1796, that he pointed out to us in the remote Villa Falconieri the residence of the unfortunate King. But this lower Villa Falconieri is the most modest of the [p. 50] Frascatian show-villas, and how sad the view of it was. Most of the shutters of the moderately large houses were closed, everything round about was still; the garden neglected; melancholy emptiness encompassed the buildings.

The son, the actual King, has been banished from Rome by a decree of the tyrant [Napoleon] to the hill town of Genzano. In this locality the famine conditions seemed to make themselves less noticeable than in Albano. We drove by way of Mondragone to Monte-Porcio. The morning was enchanting, the great spectacle lay open before us, clearly illuminated by the bright morning light. The terrace in front of the giant eagle’s nest of Mondragone, [which looks] as though hewn from the rock, and its solemn lonely situation has something ominously

11'To you, my Lotte, I may say that on this evening your mother’s poem, “The Alban Lake,” was conceived in her soul.
gruesome about it. The wide grove of majestic hundred-year-old pines, which mournfully raise their lightning-struck and storm-bent tops; the horrid emptiness that surrounds the huge building, around which float all the shudders of memory of the woeful fate of the Cenci family; the sudden flight from their high nests of startled birds of prey, appearing like the Manes of that vanished tragic race: everything filled us with secret horror, [p. 51] and Ida’s prayer not to enter this ghostly nest was willingly granted today.\(^\text{12}\)

But on the terrace, the charms of ever-cheerful young nature held us fast and swathed a gruesome past with its magic veil. The view here is as tremendous as the building and the terraces, heaped up as though by Cyclopaean hands, which command them; and we left them lost in deep wonder, silent and shaken.

The pleasant little excursion to Monte-Porcio was a real festival of joy. The way proceeds lightly and agreeably, girdling this hill, beneath elms, mulberries and German oaks. The sun was hot, the air clear, the birds sang. We had soon covered the two miles, and came to the steep round hill which is crowned by the little town. From afar an enticing place of residence; within, a resort of poverty and the most disgraceful uncleanness. We located the free terraced square which is supposed to provide the inhabitants with a place for evening strolling and taking the air, and found it used for a purpose, and both seven [p. 52] years ago and today stubbornly dedicated thereto, which, to say the least, like the state of agriculture hereabouts, proves that the descendants of the Porcier [swine?] of the earth do not take advantage of [?] the great vehicle of agriculture, the natural tribute of all beings, and have only the nickname of the Catos left.\(^\text{13}\) Scarcely did we find a little spot where we could stand without disgust. What a profaned sanctuary! It has this view, out and around, in the sharpest contrast with that gigantic panorama of Mondragone, a quiet sweet delight which holds one, where the other provokes horror. A pleasantly bordered amphitheater of the surrounding peaks of the Algidus unfolds in wildly romantic mountain terrain, abruptly rising heights from which oak and chestnut woods shimmer down in still summery green. In between shine the cool high mountain meadows. Picturesquely poised on the tip of an abrupt cliff summit lies the little town of Monte-Compatri, as though overhanging the depths from the precipice. Nearby beneath us is the round isolated foothill of Monte-Colonna, with its small village bowered in wine and olive gardens. The cultivation of the land does seem to be somewhat less neglected here than in the Alban mountains.* We would gladly have returned today by way of this [p. 53] little town, but the road was cativissimo, the coachman assured us; he also seemed not to know it properly, and we, remembering the adventure of Rocca di Papa, gave up the idea. Between Sabina and Abruzzo we looked deep into ethereal mountain distances, where glittering, already snow-covered summits closed the views. As we continued round the little town, the most wonderful panorama gradually opened up. The whole Campagna opened. On the left, Frascati lay encamped with its

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\(^{12}\)Read about the history of the Cenci family in the fine work of Frau von der Recke [or Ratke; print obscured].

\(^{13}\)The obscurity of this sentence is largely dispelled by the next sentence (Translator).
majestic groves and groups of oaks, plane trees, pines and cypresses beneath the Tuscanian mountain skull. On the right you look around the mountain corner of the Algidus into the high mountain valley of Palestrina, which separates the prehistoric volcanic world of the Algidus and Albano from the prehistoric Neptunian world of the Apennines. There, on its shining white chalk mountain foot, lies the little town of Palestrina. We did not drive all the way back to Mondragone, but turned into the garden which belongs to a building in which the students of the Collegio-Romano hold their autumn villeggiatura, and where we ate a frugal lunch under olive trees. Then we drove down a steep, viciously bumpy road, deep down under Mondragone and Frascati; [p. 54] there we saw a lonely dairy farm, next which antique walls and unkempt shrubbery caught our eye; we were quickly out of the carriage and entered the empty open courtyard of the building. Everything was deserted; for now is the best pasturage here, and the people are already gathering the first olives. Sideways from the court there ran five to seven long vaulted arches (Hallen) beneath the wall of full-fledged opus reticulatum, larger than the cisterns of the Alban Pretorium, but smaller than those of the Maecenas Villa in Tivoli. At their end (for as usual one could pass through openings from one unit into another) they were joined at acute angles by a long side unit; here the stucco was still fresh as from yesterday and polished smooth. Whole families of cryptogams covered the walls, where only a beam of daylight entered. The grottos were of such a length that the light of noonday just shone through the opening as far as the end wall. Only Gmelin knew these ruins and drew them.

Still descending very steeply, with splendid backward looks at the fairylike buildings and groves of Frascati, Mondragone, the Villa Conti, the Ruffinella, etc., so that in spite of the uneven stone [p. 55] paving I sat backward almost the whole way, we suddenly found ourselves in the august desert of the Roman Campagna, where, especially around this season, when all harvesting is ended earlier than in the mountains, all life seems to have died out. We soon reached the fine fountain of Pope Clement XII; why was no shady grove planted round about it, so that the weary wanderer could first cool off before the cold drink? Then we drove beneath the great aqueduct arch known as Porta-Furba, where old and rebuilt water-systems come together, and soon, leaving behind us the high hill with the grave of the Emperor Severus, entered Rome by the Porta San Giovanni. Among Rome’s grandiose entries, as though they belong to the Rome of all times, this is perhaps the most imposing; the city wall, the gate itself are old, and the former extends itself majestically around, with the splendid arch-rows (Hallenreihen) of the old aqueducts and the walls of the old Castrum, and encompasses a tremendous space on all sides. Ahead one sees the magnificent building of the Lateran Church. Beside it shines from afar the colossal mosaic [p. 56] on the great niche (Blende) of the scala santa. To one side stands in the shadow of strong walls the beautiful church of [Santa] Croce di Gerusalemme, surrounded on both sides by the picturesque groups of the old Castrum and of a Temple of Venus. Here rises up the elegant figure of the ruin called Minerva-Medica; then the obelisk of Constans, and the fine church of [Santa] Maria-Maggiore, with the one surviving column of the temple of the Flavii, and the obelisk from the Circus of Caracalla; [then] past the Coliseum and up the Quirinal, through the tremendous street, over the charming square of the

14He reigned from 461 to 471.
four Fountains (*Quattro fontane*), which mark the intersection of four streets, each ending, through a perspective full of magnificence, on a great visual point, among which I chose for myself today the Colossi of the Quirinal; then to the Barberini Square, encumbered with the huge palace which was built from the decorative stonework of the Coliseum; now turning in to the right and up between garden walls to where, on the height of the Pincio, under charming groups of trees, our delightful residence, the Villa di Malta, receives us.

[p. 57] *Panoramas from the Villa di Malta.*

Villa di Malta, November 9, 1802.

My first feeling was one of happy and deeply felt thanks to Him who, with fatherly care, so wove the threads of my fate that for bodily suffering (ah, very severe) there came to me high spiritual enjoyment; for only a high degree of the former procures me the latter. The building which we inhabit was a former summer residence of the Knights of Malta, arranged like a monastery. A high tower rose straight above the portion of the building which I now occupy; but there are many other lodgings in the clusters of houses wonderfully built outside and inside – with many stairways, yet grouped together around lovely little gardens – which are collectively called Villa di Malta; already living here is a sick Englishman, Sir Knight, with two sisters; many an artist has here and there behind his free balcony his picturesque little nest, and from it [commands] views that lend wings to mind and fancy. From the rooms which I occupy with Ida and our faithful Maria, a stairway leads up into a large and airy room, which, forming in itself a wing of the building, like an oriel looks into the fullness of the green [p. 58] and is surrounded on three sides by large windows. My living rooms have an unobstructed view of the garden side of the Quirinal Palace; above the hearth is a large mirror window; the fireplace is covered with a slab of marble; there I sit and cannot grow tired of it. This is precisely the noon hour, and no animating ray of sunshine escapes the feeble patient. On the west side of the house is a similar fireplace with a window. From the former I look out and over the Quirinal and Esquiline heights, farther out over the Campagna and the familiar group of the mountain ridge of the Albanus and Algidus. There the evergreen oaks of the Quirinal gardens clothe the white masses of houses, and the splendid pines hoist themselves freely and boldly into the air. Sidewise on the left, the trees of the great Medici and Borghese villas group themselves in grandiose masses; the former with the densely shadowed hill-grove known as il Bosco, the latter unfolding the great green pine-heaven. From the western window I look away over Rome to the Montorio and Janiculum, where Villa Madama and Villa Millini pose, and the ethereal pine woods and groups of the Pamfili and Corsini villas send greeting out of the fairy-vapors. [p. 59] This is the frame, and within it Rome! This is the panorama which I do not have to scale painfully in a solemn hour, but in whose center I live and can conveniently go around among the fourteen windows of our communal dwelling in order to command it.

In the small garden in front of my window, from which I am separated only by a narrow vestibule (*Hofraum*), friendly spring-fountains babble; lemons, sweet oranges, and pomegranates smell, bloom, turn green and ripen; grapevines and acacias are still green, a laurel
tree casts its shadow; capers and mimosas bloom; and the fruit of the *Cactus Opuntius* ripens; and from there I look down into Angelica’s garden and see her wandering with quiet mind. Do you understand that in these first days I do not leave my dwelling at all? That one would wish never to leave, if Rome were not Rome? that is to say, but for the fact that all objects which attract from a distance through beauty, charm and greatness, and also in their inwardness, offer to the mind and heart the richest fullness of thoughtful observation and feeling; and in this way the Rome of all times is and remains also the chosen home of my most inward life, both now and forever.

[p. 60] *Evening.*

Good night! Ah, had you been with me, as at a late hour I lingered successively at all the windows and the moon, sidewise, poured silver streams on the high buildings of the Quirinal, and blacker shadows darkened beside them; then silvered the densely growing evergreen oaks, the pine trunks shone like silver columns, and the light umbrella tops swayed above them; and then all the cupolas of Rome were as though awakened in the refulgence, and the roof of the Pantheon glowed in the distance, and farther off the airy Pantheon, the dome of St. Peter. It became difficult to find my bed.

And now that I have introduced you into our lovely home, I hope that you will very often inhabit the same and our beloved Rome with us in thoughts.
PART TWO, SECTION TWO

To Ida, Countess of Bombelle, née Brun

[p. 61] Introduction.

Although you, beloved daughter, were my charming companion on this journey, you were still so young that it is not to be expected that the recollection of the more serious part of the objects which the Eternal City offers in such profusion should not have been at least half erased from the stream of a very eventful life. But though you were at that time just entering your tenth year, your mind nevertheless was unusually active and prepared beyond your age. From your latest intellectually gifted playmate, the loving friend of children, Bonstetten (just because he, the insightful esthetician, sees the human being most purely in the child), you little by little heard, not only read aloud but acted, a great deal from the Iliad and the Odyssey, from Plutarch’s, Dionysius’ of Halicarnassus and Sophocles’ high thoughts, as [p. 62] perhaps he [Bonstetten] alone does it; and playing with your doll on the floor, you soon showed an interest which astonished us. Ever since my first trip to Italy, your precocious sense of beauty had been so richly nurtured on my little collection of engravings, and your accurate vision already guided you unerringly to the truly beautiful, which from then on you imitated and expressed with such true appreciation in forms and colors.

So I believe that I am doing no superfluous service to you (and, perhaps, to many feminine souls akin to you in the love and feeling for art), if I first refresh your memory of the winter (of 1802 and 1803) which we passed in the society of Bonstetten, Zoega, Fernow and the noble von Humboldt family. You saw and heard at that time with an attentiveness which is often more characteristic of second childhood than of first youth – which, dazzled by the brilliancy of life, feels more than it sees, and enjoys more than it thinks. Ah, who can forget the lovely years of first youth, in which rosy light and flowery fragrance and sweet flattering tones lull the young soul in a half-waking dream of bliss? Where feeling [p. 63] struggles victoriously with thought, and there flutter around us only sweetly deceptive magical pictures? Where external life with its power calls upon us, while an inner life at the same time draws us deeply back within ourselves, whence, when the sweet cup of youth is emptied, there remain to us far fewer distinct remembrances (though far more feelings) than those of childhood? Return then with me to our lovely Villa di Malta, in the cheerful morning, encamped in the great mirror window over the fireplace. How picturesquely, there in the southwest, the groups of ruins of the Baths of Titus rise up from the Esquiline Hill, and, from far out in the hazy Campagna, the long arcades (Hallenreihen) of the old aqueducts! How the majestic pines of the Colonna Garden drink the pure rays of the sun, and how shimmering and dewy the peak of Monte-Cavo shines across to us out of the distance!

Driving out with Fernow on November 10 [1802] to the churches of Rome (basilicas). Misuse of the remains of the Baths of Diocletian, the antique columns, etc. Sarcophagus of
But now the carriage is here, and friend Fernow with it! The cheerful morning sky, however, has veiled itself in thick clouds; it thunders, lightens, hails, and rain follows in streams. Then, in Rome, one visits the great churches, whose gigantic [p. 64] walls are only gradually penetrated by the outer air, and which in winter are as tepid as in summer they are dangerously cold. We visited first today the great, beautiful Maria-Maggiore, one of Rome's seven basilicas. This name was given to many Christian churches in the first centuries of Christianity because the large buildings in which the Roman courts sat, and which were called Basilicas, were suited in size and form to be converted into houses of God. This, however, was not the case with our beautiful and elegant Maria-Maggiore, which is built on the foundations of a temple dedicated to Juno-Lucina, the special protective goddess of pregnant and parturient women and of early childhood. Forty-eight Ionic columns of Salino marble from Thasos (so called because it contains sparkling crystals like those of salt) adorn and separate the naves of the handsome and airy church. The peristyle is borne by ten majestic granite columns, of that reddish Egyptian granite which sparkles with great quartz crystals. Some of these still lie unused on the outer walls, and seem to be siblings of those still standing in the church of Santa Maria degli Angiolì, which Michel Angelo [p. 65] incorporated into the gigantic ruins of the Baths of Diocletian; in addition, one regretfully notices in the street signs down the whole length of the Quirinal the degrading use to which the fragments of this noble stone have been devoted. This church, dedicated in particular to the Holy Virgin, is all cheerfulness and happy adornment, but less interesting in terms of paintings, sculptures and antiquities than many which are less frequented; but its whole construction has about it something grandiose and therefore attractive.

This cannot by any means be said of the renovated mother of the Roman churches, the basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano. This is both outwardly and inwardly an epitome of the ostentatious tastelessness of past centuries. One would scarcely believe that such a peristyle, portico and facade, made up of nothing but heavily heaped-up broken lines (aus lauter gebrochenen Linien schwer aufgehäufi) could have come into being in Rome. One laments the fate of the antique pillars of Egyptian porphyry and Spanish Verd'-Antico, which had to allow themselves to be cut up into the little pillars which now carry the niches on both sides of the nave, full of oversized statues of apostles and saints. Beautiful are only the four majestic antique bronze Corinthian columns [p. 66] which support the high altar. These were poured from the temple booty of Jerusalem, and, if I am not mistaken, consecrated by Titus' order to the Capitoline Jupiter; they are among the most exalted witnesses of classical antiquity. You have certainly not forgotten the splendid mosaic, after the beautiful painting of Guido Reni, which represents the praying pope from the house of Corsini and adorns the magnificent funerary chapel of this Roman family, nor the finely fashioned sarcophagus which contains the bones of this pope, and of which it is generally believed that it was removed from the peristyle of the Pantheon, where it was supposed to have contained the ashes of the builder of that monument, the staunch and courageous maritime hero Marcus Agrippa, the victor of Actium. But it is much more likely that Marcus Agrippa was interred in the family tomb of Augustus by the Tiber, than in a temple consecrated to all the gods, since this in the mind of the ancients would have
amounted to the greatest profanation. A sarcophagus similar to this one was found on the Esquiline.

From the fine steps of Maria-Maggiore, there is an excellent view of the arcades (Hallen) of the Julian Aqueduct, and especially the fine ruin of the château d’eau (Wasserkastell) [p.67] on the left-hand side; for this fine building already lies half outside of inhabited Rome, and one finds oneself in rustic quiet, surrounded by deserted streets and large gardens. The great column in front of the church, which bears a statue of the Holy Virgin, is of the most beautiful Giallo-Antico, and the only one remaining from the splendid building of the Flavians, the magnificent Temple of Peace, which contained also a museum and a large library. The obelisk behind the church was previously placed by Caracalla in his circus, and from there removed from the dust of the centuries and brought here and set up again.

The view from the steps of the Lateran you saw so frequently, and it is so uniquely beautiful, that I will not depict it for you. Come to see it again, for today the air is too dim. The so-called Baptistry of Constantine (according to popular legend he was here baptized – that is, immersed – but according to history [he was] perhaps never [baptized], though he allowed it to be believed) is built into an antique octagon of the sort that still appear to us in the fair form of the Minerva Medica on the Esquiline (remains of the Baths of Titus), of the Tempio della Tosse in Tivoli (remains of the Baths of Sallust or Maecenas), and [p. 68] being called baptistries even by the ancients, likewise formed the part of the baths in which one submerged. The outer walls of the Baptistry of Constantine are of a later period. The graceful frieze between the two superposed rows of columns, which surround the font (Taufbecken), belong to the remnants of a better style than that of Constantine’s time; the surrounding columns, though small, also seem old. Imposing are the two powerful Ionic columns of the most beautiful porphyry at the entrance to the building, with their pretty capitals of white marble.


On the next day we went early to St. Peter’s Church, in order to hear some beautiful music of Guglielmi in the Chapel of the Canonici. I still remember your astonished silence on seeing the noblest building of new Rome, and then the delighted heaven-gazing eye with which you appeared to accompany the floating tones of the soprano voice from the high balconies, and to take them into yourself with half-opened smiling lips. The whole expression of your dear little being, as though dissolved in euphony, is still present to me. The old Guglielmi performed in person. The fugues of this composer are especially beautiful; meaningfully and [p. 69] powerfully intertwining, they give worthy utterance to the thoughts of high revelations. Furthermore, since the financial resources for sacred music have been much diminished through the Frankish invasion, the artists go where they are paid, and music now languishes in Rome like everything else. The vocal parts were still reasonably well taken, but the instrumental accompaniment was very thin. We remained wandering quietly about in the splendidly capacious space until a streaming rain had cleared the atmosphere. Do you remember, my Ida,
with what astonishment you stood before the great mosaic painting depicting the impressive scene from the history of the Apostles, in which Ananias dares to deceive the high Apostle and falls down dead at the latter's words, "You have deceived not men, but God!"? The men are carrying him out, and one sees his beautiful young wife Saphira, guilty of the same crime and struck by the same sentence, pale, dying prostrated on the steps which lead to the (already very exalted) seat of the alleged first among the Popes.

We utilized the favorable hours to visit the nearby and unforgettable Villa Pamfili. The view from the balcony of its main building [p. 70] (a country house *[Landhaus]*) is here called a Casino) must indeed be termed uniquely beautiful! But one must be careful, in the neighborhood of Rome — for we left Rome's walls, passing through Bernini's colonnade and the Fabbrica Gate and driving to the right up the hill, which is a continuation of the Montorio — not to resort *too soon* to this exclusive expression. For one does overlook Rome, the unique Rome, from the unimpeded slope! But oh, [from a place] where one must now cease to be a participant in the surrounding life of the present in order to lead an ideal life, surrounded only by nature, history and art. That world-governing Rome of the Capitol, this mind-governing Rome of the Vatican, have fallen away! They have completed the cycle of their being!

The Pope no longer resides in the Vatican Palace; the French have plundered his rooms, and the Neapolitan hordes which followed have laid them waste. The Villa Medici (whose splendid groves and buildings look across to us from the distant ridge of the Pincian Hill) has also been devastated by the Neapolitans and is now closed. [At] the Pietro in Montorio church, here on our left, these barbarians have also devastated and burned the cloister, broken down the surrounding walls [p. 71] of the magnificent terrace, and scarcely spared Raphael's immortal painting of the Transfiguration. The splendid Villa Albani, on the other hand, hallowed through the memory of Winckelmann, through Leucothoe, Pallas and Mengs, was plundered by the French; what could not readily be carried off was assaulted with base ill will or variously damaged by inventive malice; it stands empty, and those artistic treasures which could be saved are in part hidden. The Villa Ludovisi, whose picturesque pine and cypress groves signal us from a distance, has kept its art treasures; but the owner no longer opens it except for specially favored persons.

The misery of the people, and also of the middle class, increases daily. Every day one sees moribund, languishing individuals ["mute" crossed out] creeping past one or appealing, in the weak voice of shamefaced poverty, and often, also, with the sounds of despairing misery, to the, alas, all too futile commiseration of the passersby. All prices have doubled in the seven years of Roman misery that broke over the city just as I was leaving it in 1796, and the sources of aid and supplementary help of all kinds have dried up. The price inflation, even of the otherwise cheap if not very nutritious vegetables, [p. 72] is so great, that broccoli stalks (like our kale with sweet pith) have from garbage become an object of speculation. There are monopolists who gather them up and sell them to the hungry.

On the way back we passed the commemorative column of the pious Antoninus, and you
quite innocently asked an acquaintance, who was accompanying us, who it was that had taken
the trouble to strike off the heads of all the Roman soldiers and Thracian prisoners; and thus we
too learned how modern Roman barbarity has outraged the immortal works of the ancients.
About fifty years ago, a Prince C**i* had to give a party at which a large firework was to be set
off, and lo! he chose the splendid Antonine Column as its scaffolding. The great crackers,
rockets, fire-wheels, etc. were fastened to the protruding parts of the high reliefs, especially to
the heads, which often stood out quite free from the marble backing. The next morning they
picked up the heads in hundreds around the column! All centuries bring forth barbarians in all
countries, unless law and good customs are upheld through alertness and severity.

I will recall less about artistic matters to your [p. 73] memory; you can read enough, and
perhaps too much, about them in my first Roman diary; and you saw and heard more on the
occasion of our last stay in the Eternal City. But of all that flowed from the lips of Zoega
concerning antiquity, nature and art, no word must be lost; for only too often did we surrender
ourselves to mere intimate chatter with him! Sure of our possession, and of his unvarying joy at
being with us, we too often took advantage only of the friend, and did not dip deeply enough into
this well of true knowledge. He himself loved cheerfulness and jest, and, above all, the
enjoyment of nature; if the weather was fine (and only seldom, only when the Tramontana or
the Libeccio blustered, did he find it bad enough, after a short hour in the cold, stuffy museums,
ot to long for the open air), he was all cheerfulness and joy, sought and picked flowers with
you, and then often found matter for instructive conversation in some grave monument, hidden
in the deep shadow of the laurel, myrtle and oleaster bushes and overgrown with ivy; but then
he did not like any note-taking. Thus he often slipped away from us unused, though not unenjoyed; for the [p. 74] finest jest, a feeling for nature, to which art set the crown, a poetically
rich imagination tending to melancholy, made these promenades with him true idylls, and while
he willingly forgot the deeply inquiring scholar, his whole being traveled back with him into the
mind and spirit of antiquity, to which he belonged most thoroughly and with his whole way of
thinking and feeling, more than to the time in which he lived, struggled and died.

November 12, with Zoega. Basilica of Santa Agnese fuori le Mura. Grave Monument of
the family of Constantine. Difference between “antique” and “old” according to Zoega.
Nomentana Bridge. Canova’s Studio.

The air was mild, and our dear Zoega today benevolently joined us. We drove out
through the Porta Pia (the former Nomentana Gate, which, with the Nomentana Bridge and Via,
took its name from Rome’s young neighboring city of Nomentum) to the beautiful little basilica
called Santa Agnese fuori le Mura. This is our Zoega’s favorite church, because it corresponds
most closely to his classical sense in the unity of the plan and the purity and regularity of the
forms. It was built by the great Theodosius, and stands in a peculiar fashion half in the earth,
perhaps in order to situate it directly on land consecrated by holy graves. [p. 75] The whole
design is completely regular in all respects, and the light falling upon it from above illuminates it
in a stately manner. Sixteen fine marble columns support the nave; ten of them are of different
kinds of stone, of the fine Breccia marble from Tasis in the Peloponnese, now called Porto-
Santo; but two are of black and white grained Egyptian granite. The second row of smaller columns which supports the window arcades is mediocre. Four fine columns of red porphyry support the high altar, where an old statue with a splendid garment represents Saint Agnes. A Christ in marble by Michel Angelo is a very dry bust in outline and expression. This great artist from the Titans' race could not represent the ideal of Christ, in which strength and mildness, severity and compassion must be fused in a single expression. Two wonderfully worked antique candelabra in white marble, richly and fantastically wreathed in leaves and flowers, adorn this sanctum. If the nave of St. Peter's possessed these simple and correct proportions, instead of being supported by the heavy pilasters, by columns corresponding to its gigantic size, one would sink down before the awe-inspiring [p. 76] greatness of the boldly proportioned space, in which one now wanders around all too casually and comfortably. Descending the long and wide staircase to the church of St. Agnes, one sees on the wall, especially on the right, many old inscriptions and carvings set into the wall. Do you remember the charming bas-relief of a child's sarcophagus with the childish feast of Amor and Psyche? It forms the frontispiece of the second edition of my poems, and had never before been engraved except after this drawing of the great Carstens, and never explained except in the notes of Zoega.

We now entered the nearby old building known as the Tomb of the Family of Constantine the Great, now transformed into a church of Saint Constantia and, as Zoega says and Ammian Marcellin (a general of Emperor Julian) confirms, previously a temple of Bacchus. The graceful rotunda lies mournfully on a small, roundish hill and overlooks a little valley which lies between the Salarian and Nomentanian roads. On all sides one is surrounded by vine-clad hills, crowned by the Lepri and Albani villas and graced by the classic groves of cypresses, pines and laurels, which, with their grave solemnity, belong so completely to Rome's environs. [p. 77] The interior of the rotunda presents a strange mixture of antique, old and new. (You will remember that Zoega bestows the designation of antique only on the remains of antiquity before Constantine; he calls old the things up into the sixth century after Christ, and new everything thereafter.) It is built of Roman bricks (as is the Pantheon) and covered with the splendid white stucco which seems like marble to the sight and often to the touch. The vault is supported by twenty-four linked granite columns, placed in a circle; outside of the columns, on the walls and the ceiling of the building, are the antique fresco paintings representing the cultivation of the vines, the vintage, the bringing in and the treading of the grapes, surrounded and accompanied by happy vine-garlands, birds and genii. But inside the columns the ceiling is painted with martyrs' histories from much later periods of art.

As to the two large sarcophaguses of red porphyry which are shown in the Pio-Clementino Museum under the names of Constantine and his daughter, Saint Constantia, it is probable that the latter is genuine and that she was interred here when this temple of Bacchus was rededicated as a Christian church. [p. 78] But the other sarcophagus, decorated with encircling vine-leaves and Bacchic genii in fine craftsmanship, never held the remains of Constantine, who died in Nicomedia and was probably buried there by Herodes.

Concerning the mysterious space, surrounded by walls of poor, late workmanship, that is
called the Hippodrome of Constantine, Zoega has no decisive opinion; but there you, little antiquarian who were always on the lookout for antique fragments, found a piece of a gravestone which bore fine heathen inscriptions on one side and, on the other, barbaric Christian ones, and which greatly pleased our distinguished antiquarian, even though one often finds such reused gravestones.* We still wanted to pay a visit to the old Nomentanian Bridge; but as we neared it, we found the countryside flooded far and wide by the Anio, which had overrun its banks, so that only a few handbreadths of the structure emerged from the water. It must have rained fearfully in the Sabine Hills, and was just beginning to stream down on us again. This kind of rain, which pours down as though out of pipesemts, falling not in drops but in streams, was [p. 79] completely unknown to you. The Roman, too, then says, "diluvial" — it's the Flood.

On the next day we paid our first visit together to the studio of Canova, the celebrated darling of the Graces. He himself was still away, but already on his way back from Paris, where he had unavoidably deferred to the repeated and ever more categorical invitations of the First Consul [Napoleon] to do the latter's portrait bust. Not so frequently has this highly intelligent individual, delightful in every sense of the word as man and artist, mistaken the spirit of his genius and the limits of his talent! I shall be completely silent to you, first regarding all his colossi and secondly his gladiators, and shall myself go quietly past his peace-bringing Mars and his Apollonizing Perseus. But follow me to your playmates, the comrades of your childhood and at one time of your youth! See the truly most gracious new group of Amor and Psyche, which perhaps will be admired in future centuries even more than today, if jealousy and fashion, disparaging and overpraising, have fallen silent!

He leans, with an expression of the most melting tenderness and the purest self-surrender, with his [p. 80] head on her neck; she stands erect, but with her little head tenderly inclined toward him, and gently places the butterfly in his open hand, as much as to say: "See, I give you my better self, my soul!" He receives, with the sweetest expression of thankful joy, the highest gift of love. It is a dangerous Amor, sweet Ida; he receives the highest, without asking, through his quiet wish!

The little heads and faces, ringed with soft locks, are flawless in form, gentle, tender and sweet. He is unclothed. She has a simple and prettily disposed garment, knotted about her body, which falls to the tender feet. While causing this three-quarter life-size group to be conveniently rotated, one cannot sufficiently admire the rounded, tender fullness of the youthful outlines and their flawless beauty; everything is firm and solid (kernig und fest), and yet tenderly finished. At every moment one expects the roseate and lily tints of life to overspread these surfaces, equally soft to the look and to the touch. This group, moreover, is the most beautiful Canova has made—although (if one listens to many of the foreign artists) full of faults, which we however were fortunate enough to be unable to see because of the sheer beauty.

[p. 81] You, however, perceived a dawning glow of the future in the presence of these gracious figures. Canova's celebrated Hebe is alleged to float on clouds, and [in reality] can only stand on them: stone clouds, floating stone, are eternal contradictions. Aside from this,
however, this charming figure deserves its reputation, and its pose and movement are so light and graceful that they need no stone clouds to remind us of the superterrestrial which surrounds it like an invisible vapor. She holds in her raised right hand the graceful nectar jug, and in her left the basin into which she pours the drink of immortality and eternal youth. The narrow band around her forehead and the lovely little head, and the pitcher and basin, are gilded, which makes a very good effect and later, through the rebuttal of all would-be criticism by the example of the Elgin marbles, was approved by Phidias himself as a justifiable embellishment. Here, Canova had sensed the spirit of antiquity and ventured boldly and successfully.

The head of this delightful being is of a charming beauty; its outline, the ambrosian locks are full of grace and elegance; but above everything else, what strikes to the inmost heart is the truly antique expression of her glance, so quiet and full of the serene peace of self-sufficient innocence. Breast, neck, shoulders, the softly swelling bosom in the first budding of youth, the gently dividing wavy line down the tender back: all is youth, the first vernal bloom of untouched virginity. The garment, through the same error that formed clouds of marble, is so blown upward (as by a breeze, as if she floated in the air), as only painting can magically show us. Canova works the marble tenderly, gently and nobly. He knows how to give it a kind of transparency which produces an incomparable effect in sculptural works of less than life size like the last-named, in Amors, Hebes, Graces and their retinue of Genii. These tender, scarcely corporeal beings seem to have been nurtured on superterrestrial food and hardly to belong to the earth.


Do you remember the splendid view of the Villa Poniatowski up on the left, after one has crossed the Ponte-Molle? You enjoyed so much the open arch (Halle), set about with pretty benches and with grandiose arbors, shrubs, flowers, and birds painted al fresco. I brought you and our Bonstetten there on the 22nd of November, in the double recollection, first, that today was the birthday of one who was already once transfigured on earth, the immortal Abbot of Jerusalem; and second, that I once spent some happy hours here with my exalted friend Louise, Princess of Dessau, and my brother Matthisson. The former has long since been left behind by the turbid stream of time, whose expiring waves we imagine ourselves to be impeding through the illusory division into years, months and days. And space and time divide the latter from me even on this side.

This prospect is distinguished especially by the view of that lonely little valley which extends from the Janiculum downward to the Tiber on the right. When the fortress of Janus stood — before all history, and lighted only by the twilight of myth—on the brow of the hill where now the cypresses of the Villa Millini stand in melancholy isolation, perhaps the blooming life of youthful time joyfully filled these now deserted fields. The lighting of the grand prospect was today most fantastic. My friend, the gently breathing, nerve-relaxing Notus [the south wind] (also called Scirocco), parted the clouds, and the torchlight of the penetrating sun fell magically
upon the distant shrouded hills.* [p. 84] The Tiber rolled downward in silvery full waves between the freshly greening hills, and flung its free majestic bow through the great open space eternalized by the battle of Constantine the Great and Raphael’s *Iliad*-like painting. Thence it proceeded in triumph into the midst of the immortal hill city. We drove along that interesting way along the Tiber and beneath the Madama and Millini villas, through the Porta Angelica into the Vatican City, through St. Peter’s Square, down through the Strada Longara between the Farnesina and the Corsini Palace, and back across the Ponte Sisto; but today I can only name what it requires weeks to contemplate. * Several days of a painful indisposition which befell me had kept us both at home. But they passed quite easily; our Bonstetten’s splendid readings during the long quiet evenings; the visits of our faithful friends Fernow and Zoega, of the sturdy Reinhardt and the well-disposed Prussian Resident Uhden, the versatile Zurich sculptor Keller—all save Uhden friends since 1795—made the dreary days pass rapidly; for here all conversations have an inward life, and it is almost impossible to fall into the commonplace [p. 85] chatty tone of intellectual indolence, since almost everyone has a special aim, has chosen some branch of knowledge or of art, and these different elements all conjoin to form a cultural circle which shines together on old Rome and ever-youthful art; and for this reason even those foreigners who, at home, often seem flat and insignificant, here seem as if they were involuntarily to rise above themselves, drawn onward by the general movement of a heightened being. Returning to the impoverished, often dry and chilling life of every day, one at times rediscovers in astonishment the very same people whom one had previously had the honor of knowing only too well.

Today the weather was fine, and our Zoega, who, like us, knows how to enjoy every good hour in the open air in this season which even in Rome is often dismal, drove with us. The Villa di Malta, though it lies within the walls of Rome, is already outside its inhabited portion; for excepting the main high thoroughfare of the Pincian Hill there is only one other way, occupied at first with poor-looking houses and then running between the garden walls of the Medici and Ludovisi villas as far as the Porta Pinciana— but serving for the passage in and out of all kinds of rubbish, [p. 86] and consequently walled off.

So wherever we want to turn in Rome, we must first descend steeply down from our Belvedere [lookout point]. A formal gate and walls, built on terraces, surround it, and we first drive steeply downward beneath an alley of mulberry trees, then as far as the Piazza Barberini, which separates the Quirinal Hill from the Pincian; thence we bear to the left, again climbing the Pincio, to the other wall of the Villa Ludovisi, which occupies the whole triangle between the Salar[i]a and Nomentana gates. Somewhat behind the great entrance gate of the Villa Ludovisi, Zoega showed us on the Pincio the site of the old Collatine Gate, which formed the apex of the triangle between the other two gates; thence we turned in on the left, still driving between garden walls, as far as the Salarian Gate, and then entered the eponymous bridge. Zoega believes that beyond this bridge was the position of the Gallic camp; the masonry of the bridge itself he believes to date from those times, and that the single combat between Manlius Torquatus and the Goliath of the Gauls took place there. The massive wall structure is fresh and undamaged. So would the whole of old Rome be, but for the conflagrations and devastations of the barbarians of all times, down to the Barberini! [p. 87] Before us to the right of the bridge
stretched the Sacred Mount — so called from the camp of the Plebeians and their flight from the iron pressure of the Patricians — gently greening along its extended backbone; beyond this, the Porta Nomentana, which received this name from the nearby town of Nomentum, to which that road leads. This locality, with the silently gliding Teverone, the tender green surrounding hills and the memories of the first Rome, has a quiet, melancholy enchantment, and it was only the sharp Libeccio (a northeast wind, well known to us) that soon drove us back within the gate.*

Between the Nomentan and the former Collinian gates, inside the walls, and surrounded by many picturesquely overgrown ruins and high walls, there lies an oval valley, known to many as the Circus of the Sallustian Villa, and by others as the Circus of Flora, where the games were held when the Tiber floods penetrated into the Circus Maximus. Notwithstanding the colossal fortune of the Roman grandee, and despite the bad name given him by the great historian—who speaks so beautifully of the virtue, simplicity and dignity of the customs of the elder generation—considering his immense wealth and the way [p. 88] in which he acquired it, it still seems to me that a public edifice of this extent exceeds the capabilities of any private individual who was neither a Dictator nor a Triumvir, and had merely plundered provinces. One overlooks first, after passing through the garden gate, but as yet having no idea of the astonishing view, the amphitheatrical depression of the fine ellipse, which is now covered terrace-fashion with vegetable beds, as is the former race track; while a heaped-up earthen mound extending the whole length gives one an idea of the spina, i.e., the wall around which the chariots drove, and at the end of which the goal was located. The rising terraces indicate the placement of the seats for the spectators; above them rise variously formed wall-groups, thickly overgrown with vegetation, and including a part of the city wall. We went up into the picturesque ruin of the Temple of Venus Erycina [of Eryx], which rises picturesquely above the hollow; it was once a pretty rotunda, with little niches in the wall; the large niche in the interior wall, opposite the cheerfully welcoming entrance, was probably occupied by the statue of the goddess; above it, a tapestry of ivy falls agreeably, as though nature wished to fill the void. [p. 89] When one looks inward past the temple, one sees a whole conglomeration of ruins, romantically overgrown by the untended shrubbery, and enjoys from this height the most charming view of the well-wooded Pincio.

On the way back, we alighted at the very spot where the two roads to the Porta Salar[ilia] (so named from a salt work of the old Romans, now surviving without the salt work) and the Porta Nomentana (now Porta Pia) come together at a sharp angle; and here stood the old Collinian (collinische) Gate. In front of it, and in fact close to the temple of Venus Erycina, popular tradition locates the dreadful cave in which the Vestals who had violated their oath descended alive and must allow themselves to be walled in to die of hunger. Ah, how so many monks and nuns, who had succumbed to no idol of gray antiquity, no blind force of nature (whose symbolic representative was the heavily veiled Vesta), but served the God of Love, brightly manifested in spirit and in truth, had to suffer this frightful death for the most human of all failings!

In the year 1795, I climbed down into the cellar, located beneath a rustic house which [p. 90] nestles in the ruins; but since Zoega does not believe in the authenticity of the site, we
passed it by today; nor did we wish to cloud your young soul with these dreadful pictures.


I am now, when Zoega or Fernow does not accompany us, quite proud to be the cicerone of Bonstetten, who, it is true, was in Italy twenty-two years ago, alone, young, handsome, charming (as his immortal Johann von Müller’s letters depict him), and more captivated by the present than by the past; and he now says that I am probably just as good as any other [guide] from the Spanish Square. Today I led him and you, the two inseparables, along the charming way beneath the Aventine into the grief-laden fields “where Lethe’s peace floats over silent foreigners’ graves,” and out Paul’s Gate [Porta San Paolo]. This lonely Via Ostiensis, with its scattered grave ruins, evokes a specially sad feeling. In Ostia, Rome’s victorious fleets landed; there the Scipios, the Aemilians, crowned with laurel, stepped ashore; by this way came and went the great Regulus, renouncing life and gloriously choosing a frightful death for the fatherland. What teeming [p. 91] life crowded there on the dark stream, which now bears only memories!* We turned about not far before St. Paul’s church, which I can visit only for a short time, and in which the air is not good for longer stays. So, to the Pyramid! Here there were no torches [enabling us] to enter the grave of Caius Cestius, in which interesting fresco paintings still survive. Dianthus and geranium bloom round about the two marble columns, deeply immersed in debris, in front of the Pyramid, which, [after being] at one time the first grave monument near the exit of the Porta Ostiensis, and stemming from the finest period of art, built during the reign of Augustus, was enclosed within the city wall only when Aurelian completed the latter. We found the grave monuments of the foreigners severely damaged (zerstört). Here, too, the ax of the Revolution had wrought outrage, and fanaticism had kindled its torch at that of unbelief; no heretic’s grave, however modest, had escaped the wild frenzy; for since the wine cellars of the Roman populace are deepened beneath the nearby Monte Testaccio (Scherbenberg [Hill of Potsherds]), all types of drunkenness have here come together. But be it said, to the credit of the Roman plebs, that no ingeniously malicious destruction (as for example in Avignon) prevailed here. In passing, people tipped over, [p. 92] walloped, but did not irreparably destroy in cold fury. How solemnly and time-defyingly the Pyramid overtops these in part easily reversible monuments!

We climbed up the Monte Testaccio. A colossal monument of the most fragile material, of heaped-up clay potsherds. Chance and millennia have formed, from the most recalcitrant materials, a high relief of a mountain chain; abrupt ascent, little valley depression, and long spinal ridge; above, a majestic panorama. If one follows the long, narrow backbone as far as the Cross which stands there, and then returns, one enjoys a wide view that includes both the upward and the outward perspectives. The nearby Aventine, so charmingly bestrewn with the loveliest groups of trees and buildings, at its base the Tiber, pressing past and then continuing beneath us as it streams through the open and depopulated Campagna in the magnificent curves peculiar to this deed-proud stream, which long draws the spectator’s gaze after it.