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by

Richard P. Stebbins, Ph.D.
ROMAN LIFE
(Römisches Leben)

by

Friederike Brun, née Münter

VOLUME ONE

Leipzig:
F.A. Brockhaus,
1833.
Abridged Contents for Volume I

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N.B. Section Two continues in Volume II, German pp. 1-197 and English pp. 1-75, covering the period January 1-June 9, 1803.

A separate index to the two volumes can be used with both the German and the English texts.

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1Page numbers of the German text are shown throughout in bold-face type in square brackets; page numbers of the English text are shown in ordinary type at the head of each page.

2The German errata list has not been translated, since the needed corrections have been incorporated directly into the English text.
TRANSLATOR’S FOREWORD

Presented herewith is a careful if possibly imperfect English translation of Roman Life (Römisches Leben), the two-volume collection of Roman reminiscences published in Germany in 1833 by Friederike Brun (1765-1835), the German-born, Danish-nurtured poet and travel writer whose fertile pen and prolonged periods of Roman residence qualify her as an authoritative and highly readable recorder of the Roman scene, at a time of breathtaking developments both archeological and political. A devotee of classical learning and a friend of such contemporary figures as the poet Goethe, the writer Germaine de Staël, the statesman Wilhelm von Humboldt, the painter Angelica Kauffmann and the sculptors Canova and Thorwaldsen, she combined some of the realistic vision of the scientist and scholar with the overflowing sensibility of the Romantic poet and artist.

In terms of its subject matter, Roman Life may be considered a sequel to the same author’s Roman Diary (Römisches Tagebuch), an account of her first visit to Rome and southern Italy in 1795-96, which was published in Zurich in 1800-1801. The present book resumes the account of her Italian experiences and observations with a detailed, day-by-day record (with later interpolations) of a second Italian visit in 1802-03, beginning with an autumnal stay in the small hill town of Albano and continuing with a winter sojourn in Rome, which was prolonged into the late spring of 1803 by the illness of her daughter Ida. The latter portion of the work is made up of later, somewhat heterogeneous writings about Italy and Rome by Brun and others, extending down to the year 1827. Though much concerned with economic and social problems as well as archeological and artistic matters, the author refers only in passing to the catastrophic effects of the Napoleonic campaigns in Italy, and avoids any direct mention of the French military occupation of Rome and the deportation of Pope Pius VII in 1809. These matters she had already dealt with, from a vigorously pro-Papal standpoint, in another book entitled Letters from Rome (Briefe aus Rom), published at Dresden in 1820.

Despite the vividness of her literary style, Brun’s penchant for long, involved and often emotional sentences poses problems for a translator endeavoring to follow in her footsteps some 175 years later. In general, I have resisted the temptation to condense her text and have preferred to follow her occasionally stilted language as closely as seemed at all reasonable. I have also followed her paragraph structure in most instances, using asterisks as warning signals in some lengthy paragraphs where she has changed the subject without any paragraph break. Words inserted by the translator with a view to clarifying the original text have in most instances been enclosed within square brackets, while words whose translation from the German may be open to question are followed in parentheses by the original German words in italics. Proper names in general follow the author’s usage, with occasional modifications designed to ensure their intelligibility to readers of English. Footnotes are those of the author except as otherwise indicated. Page references to the German original appear throughout the translation in bold-face type within square brackets.

While trying to avoid the anachronistic use of modern English terms, I have made an
exception for the word “infrastructure” to translate the German plural Substructionen, a term much used by our author in reference to the underpinnings of ancient buildings. The German word Halle, often used as an equivalent to the English “Hall,” has in many instances required translation as “Arch,” “Arcade,” “Corridor,” or “Chamber,” depending on the context. The German Portikus or Porticus, equivalent to the Latin porticus, has usually been translated “Portico” but may also signify “Colonnade,” “Arcade,” or “Gallery.” Finally, the Latinized German word Hora (plural Horae), a favorite of the author, is employed in conformity with German usage to designate the personified hours as goddesses presiding over the changing of the seasons and keeping watch at the gates of heaven.

The translator wishes to record his indebtedness to Margot L. Arnold for her careful reading of the text and her advice on linguistic and other editorial matters.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

[p. v] In the following work, the author has attempted to summarize the content of her Roman life, particularly insofar as the contact with and guidance of her immortal friend Georg Zoega, through the interpretation of the monuments of Antiquity and the enjoyment of nature and art, raised it to an [p. vii] existence whose quality and reflection now sorrowfully brighten its eventide.

These volumes will contain especially the most important part of the topography of ancient Rome, as Zoega correctly recognized it to the day of his death. The pilgrimage around the walls of Rome to the Via Appia and Latina, into the Circus Agonalis (now Piazza Navona) and the Baths of Aemilius Paulus, among other things, were broken off by his death, leaving us, his friends and pupils in Rome, orphaned. Since the first volumes of my Episoden (Episodes) are no longer available, I take from them the portions concerning the environs of Rome, and add to these an essay on the Coliseum containing the course which [p. vii] my son, with yardstick in hand, undertook with our mutual teacher; this, too, death made it impossible to complete. My son here copied day by day the completed manuscript. Everything else has been taken from the mouth of the unforgettable one, noted on the spot, then entered in the Roman diary and carefully recorded.

What I have learned in the period since 1810 about the results of more recent excavations, and have otherwise perceived from letters, will also be included.

May this attempt therefore bring much utility and pleasure also to those readers who, though unversed in the [p. viii] literature ancillary to the closer study of antiquity, desire none the less to satisfy their curiosity on this important subject.

The Author.
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PART ONE, SECTION ONE

Autumn life in Albano
Beginning of October until November 9, 1802

To my Daughter Charlotte Pauli

[p. 1] When I brought you seven years ago, my Lotte, as a frisky, mischievous young girl, to Italy and the august fields of Antiquity, we lived in Frascati and made only small excursions to Albano; so I believe that this supplement to acquaintance with these very remarkable and romantic localities, which we now cross every day, will summon up for you many a half-dimmed picture, and since my obstinate bodily sufferings have again separated us widely, let us at least share the true, the life of the soul, you my good and beloved maiden!

Unpleasantness of every first installation in the country in the vicinity of Rome

[p. 2] We remained in Rome only as long as was necessary to make a few arrangements for our establishment in Albano, and hurried here on the day following our arrival: for first of all, the vintage is already far advanced, and I must still endure a supplement to my grape cure; and secondly, one must simply tear oneself away from Rome, or one doesn’t leave it at all! Zoega, Fernow, and Keller greet you in all haste through me, and we hurry away and reach Albano toward sunset. Taking possession of a residence in or around Rome is always a very unpleasant undertaking for us who are accustomed to northern cleanliness, for one never finds rooms which answer even to the most modest demands of this first existential requirement. But the residence of which we took possession in the second floor of a quite respectable house, in the main street of the little town, united in its large and roomy chambers all the disagreeableness which uncleanness can inflict on susceptible senses, and I do not yet understand how I am going to hold out in the same. The true Marie has already washed the windows, which were already darkened to hornblende, amid continuing shouts of “bravo” and hand-clapping [p. 3] on the part of the unoccupied street urchins, who responded favorably to this new invention. I have already got rid of the indissolubly hardened dirt of the fireplace and the tables, had the bricks of the floor whitewashed, so that the intolerable smells would be absorbed by the lime; and still not a bite of anything tastes right to me, for all bodily functions come to a stop with me as long as I must breathe uncleanness. So for now I congratulate you on not being with us.

With Zoega and Fernow to the ruins of a Roman camp in Albano

Days later.

Fernow and Zoega are coming up from Rome today to visit us in our exile; for the Palazzo we inhabit (the name given here in the country to every respectable house belonging to a noble family) seems to us a place of banishment from which (like, formerly, the dear impatient Cicero from his Tuscan villas) we look down longingly upon the Eternal City, where our
winter residence has not yet been found.

Our beloved Zoega guided us into the nearby ruins of the former camp of a Roman legion, [constituting] the defense of Rome from the south. The travertine blocks, often 10, 12 to 15 feet long, masterfully hewn and put together without cement, [p. 4] show that the work is ancient and, to judge by a certain grandiose simplicity, probably from the Republic. One can follow the wall for its entire length on both sides, where it closes at the top in an elliptical rounding; there stands there a watch tower, also of stone blocks, ingeniously built in round form, still almost completely preserved, and now occupied by a poor vintner’s family, which seems to have been chosen, alone in the deep peace of poverty, to represent the powerful life of the Roman nobles. There are ruins of other buildings in the vicinity. The camp extends downhill from the height above Albano, with its wide view, to what is now the beginning of the town – all of whose streets, like the dividers of a fan, converge in front of it, and which probably owes its very existence to the stationary camp of this army of observation. The seminary of the Pauline [fathers], with its respectable looking buildings, the church and the garden, is also situated within the perimeter of the camp, and we also visited the fully preserved cisterns, surrounded by very well-preserved walls; there are extensively completed arches (Hal len) that are still in such a condition that not only is the indestructible cement intact, but even [p. 5] the whitewash is still white; this shows, like so many other relics of antiquity, that but for the barbarians of all times, most of the buildings of the ancients would have come down to us as undamaged as the works of their immortal spirits – which also have come to us only in fragments that have escaped the barbarians.

On the other side of the way up to the lake – since the lakes in the Alban Hills are sunk in extinct volcanic craters, one climbs up to their banks – we saw the most picturesque ruins of an amphitheater which Domitian, whose favorite sojourn was his Alban villa, built for the entertainment of the soldiery. It also lies downhill, and offers, with its swaying, tumbledown, overturned arches (Hal len), overgrown with the most luxuriant vegetation, all the charms of southern nature, and all the creepy scenery of an intricate fairytale. We spent the afternoon in the garden, which belongs to the Barberini Palace of Albano and occupies, with its majestic pine groves, hanging olive groves, overgrown garden plantations, and broad meadows – and traversed by the uniquely beautiful shady corridors of evergreen oaks – the whole of the abruptly descending mountain slope between Albano and Castel-Gandolfo. [p. 6] From the windows of the old Barberini palace one looks down on one side into the thought-provoking Roman Campagna, and over it in every direction. On the other side, the gaze falls right into the depths of the Alban Lake. Thus boldly chosen was the situation of almost all the villas, including those of the neo-Romans; and even among the not quite new ones, I do not know a single one that occupies a prosaic situation. Everything else, such as convenience, proximity to the water, etc., is often lacking; but never the eagle’s omni directional views!

This broad space is full of the remains of old walls, all of which are included under the name of Ruins of Domitian’s Villa. Tremendous infrastructures carry gigantic trunks of thousand-year-old evergreen oaks; their mighty roots often split the powerful walls. Their stone
blocks, firmly held together on the inside, tumble down like cliff-blocks, and the victorious life of the vegetation triumphs in youthful beauty. Splendid niches and grottoes are vaulted deep within, and the charming network of the Adiantum adorns the damp stonework, while the whole is vaulted over by tremendous oak and ivy branches. If one turns to the right from this dusky shadow, one enters a splendid [p. 7] oak alley running along the hillside, and looks beneath the deep green into the deep blue of heaven and onto the far-mirroring sea, which skirts the Campagna in the west. This side of the hill, too, is undergirded by double and triple terraced infrastructures; in the middle story is the entrance to a large grotto, popularly known as le stalle di Pompeo. Over the vaulted entrance, a wild grapevine has taken root, and allowed its proliferating, flexible branches to sink down on all sides in such a way as to conceal the entrance with a charming curtain that must be held to one side in order to enter. Who would not have thought here of Lucina Titania's grotto in Wieland's immortal Oberon? But this carpet was still hung from above with a multitude of green sweet grapes, and these fruits of the wild vine were sweeter than our grapes which are laboriously forced in the greenhouse.

Visit to the small town of Marino

It had rained for some days, and we joyfully left our uncozy residence and rode by the upper way, between the upper edge on the kettle-bank of the lake and the Villa Barberini. [p. 8] The situation of the Franciscan cloister, close to the latter, fully warrants its classical renown. Eternalized by Emelin's ingenious sepia drawing and splendid engraving, and by Verstappen's life-breathing painting, which looks as though stolen from a mirror, it still seems new to the observer in every changing view of friendly spirits (Horen).

In front of the handsome buildings of the cloister and the church, a rounded open space like a floating terrace lies between the two majestic leafy vaults of the so-called upper gallery; the finest groups of dark shadowy stone-oaks hang down from its abrupt edge. Elms and alders, with a lighter green, weave a tender net above the abyss in which the deep, dark flood, seldom reached by a breath of wind, gently shudders as though of its own motion. The clouds seem to swim in the still depths, and the outlines of the farther shore to rise from the magic mirror. Far off, the Sabine Hills open with gentle outlines above the misty plain, which gently rises toward Tivoli.

On the mountain ridge between Castel-Gandolfo (where one is always at an altitude of 12 to 1400 feet above the Roman Campagna) and the grove [p. 9] of Marino, we found on the ground the bright green leaves of the now amply watered bulbous plants, grown as high as with us in March and April, when the sun has shone for a week after the snow has melted. The narcissi were four inches above the ground, and the tulips' buds were already swelling. In addition, the grove of Marino, consisting mainly of German oaks and sweet chestnut trees, was still quite green. I recognized every one of the trees from 1796: the ivy-twined trunks, the low-hanging vine tendrils, and the poor tree, already half strangled by ivy, which raises its thinly greened crown in the air as though crying for help. One cannot look at it without thinking on
what is perhaps the loveliest of Goethe’s elegies. The fragrance of all species of mint in full bloom permeated the air.

Arriving in the little town of Marino, we visited in its deep valley between the hills the Villa Colonna, which has now been bought by a countryman. The formal gardens are deserted and overgrown; but uncannily [p. 10] beautiful! Lost paths creep through the tall grass, bedewed by a grove-spring; from above, hundred-year-old trees cast a deep twilight; scarcely does the sky look through here and there. Isolated, ruined garden decorations look enigmatically out of the dark shadows. From the walls of the destroyed villa⁴ shimmered the elegant outlines of the raised sculptural elements of antique sarcophagi, and the funerary inscriptions seemed to whisper with touching voices: “They who tore us from our places, – scattered the ashes, which we enclosed, have turned to dust like you! Sunken is the work of their hands, whispering grass covers their traces!”

This little town hangs, like nearly all these rock masses rent by ancient volcanic disturbances, over a bent-over mountainous cleft whose depths fill out the grounds of the villa. When one ascends by the carriage road, one looks down into the outlet of the cleft, which, opening itself to the daylight, is pleasantly covered with vegetable gardens and animated by a fresh spring. And this is the [p. 11] old, holy spring of union dedicated to the Ferentine Nymph (der ferentinischen Nymph). Instead of the dignified, long-bearded representatives of the Latin cities, there now assemble around it the women of the town, now in colorful groups united for the general lauding, now singly, coming and going to fetch water; their cheerful gossip, laughter and song resound through the little valley, and I often saw fair figures wandering there and charming groups forming themselves before my eyes.

Wine-growing, as in all these hill towns, is the dominant concern, and the wine harvest this year, which is still going on, is very rich. But although these light country wines are very agreeable when fresh, none of these wine-peasants, except for the inhabitants of Genzano (on the Lake of Nemi) know how to make this spiritual grape juice in the right way for preservation.

Now, after the rain, the earth is shining with fat and is only lightly stirred up; broccoli, endives, artichokes are transplanted and bedded out in vast quantities. But all these vegetables, which taste very good to us, but are poor in nutriment, I could willingly exchange for the half-starving populace into the blessed potato, which is scarcely known here, and [p. 12] which could save these poor people from the frightfully threatening hunger of this year; for ah, this misery of the people, which has been caused by numerous converging circumstances and has been growing for several years, is very great! Since the Revolution, the Fake Republic and the wars of insurrection, during which all these hill towns were ravaged by the rebellious peasants of the

⁴Amyntas.

⁴One very often finds the representational elements of the old funerary urns incorporated in the walls of the new Roman villas.
Abruzzo, after first the Liberator's – the French – had pillaged them, there reigns every winter an insidious and ever-increasing famine in the whole Roman Campagna and the mountains.

The Roman grandees, quietly bled (geaderlassten) by the French, think only of increasing their yearly income. They have been compelled to discharge a part of their swarms of servants, who now increase the misery and the ranks of the hungry. The peasant of the Campagna is a day-laborer, or he leases from a landlord [one of] the tiny plots into which the huge landholdings of the Roman grandees are subdivided. These subtenants, exploited, [p. 13] lacking suitable farm implements, spiritless, unsupported, have been unable to discharge their rental obligations. If the tenant does not pay in the third year, the lease is void. Already many fields have lain untilled for several years; and vineyards also have been abandoned here and there. With the ever-increasing depopulation of this splendid country, the punishment falls back on the foolish owners, who wish neither to abate the rent nor to support the impoverished people. So the rent is lost and the property goes to ruin.

It is strange what an unpleasant smell is given out by the freshly turned earth here, whereas with us after the rain a refreshing odor arises from the plowing. I believe this fat sod is never sufficiently aerated. In the North, after the first plowing, the field is softened up by wind and rain and penetrated by the atmospheric air, then plowed for a second and, by good cultivators, for a third time (and does not Homer speak of thrice-tilled soil?). Here they scratch the ground every three years to a depth of three or four inches, throw in the seed and cover it over; all this in two or three days. And even for this non-cultivation (Uncultur), as for the hay and [p. 14] grain harvest, the depopulated Campagna cannot provide arms enough, but the country people come down from Umbria to sow and to reap.

The gold mine of agriculture – manure, straw, grape residues, vegetable remnants, cover and pollute all the streets of these towns; and the Roman Campagna has as its neighbor Tuscanay, where even the leaves of the trees are saved for litter and fodder. There is no sharper contrast than between these neighboring states; but the Tuscan peasant is a landlord, and this one word solves the riddle.

Up on the outside of the height on which Marino lies, there remains a rather well-preserved palace of the Princes Colonna. Here one looks out over the broad Campagna, in which now in the declining day all the vapors arising after the rain turn to colors. The sea, although a mile and a half distant, always appears deceptively near, both before and after rain. The sun sank and at first mirrored itself in the floods, before the glowing disk touched the edge of the waves, which it then seemed to divide and was itself divided. We rode back in the most delightful twilight through the lower galleries, whose trunks [p. 15] are after all the noblest of all the arboreal princes of this mountain range.

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3It reigned again in the winter of 1817.
Misery of the inhabitants of this locality. Its causes traced to the period of the decadence of the Roman Republic.

Bonstetten wanted to undertake a rather distant excursion today, in order to investigate the traces of Aeneas’ first city, Lavinium, and the residence of his rival Turnus, Ardea, since the position of the little towns that represent them, Citta Lavinia and Ardea, are known. We accompanied him for a part of the distance, and were then beset by such a severe and persistent rain that all of us were compelled to take shelter in one of the Huts of Misery, since one can find no other name for the homes of the pitiful inhabitants of the Roman Campagna.

We found a family of former subtenants which, through general misfortune, had sunk down little by little into the pitiful status of the day laborers of the region. Even now, while work in the vineyards and fields is still available, they are experiencing hunger, and during the coming winter, when daily wages cease and bread, which is already becoming more expensive, [p. 16] will double in price, their fate is, ah! not difficult to foresee.

In this dwelling of slowly languishing poverty we found no beds, not even straw, no kitchen utensils around the cold hearth, no domestic appurtenances. What do you cook in, dear people? Answer (accompanied by a tremblingly bitter smile): “We never cook!” What do you eat then? Answer (while the man took down from a shelf a dry bread, the size of one of our four-shilling sourbreads): “I will divide this for the whole day; as long as the vintage lasts, I am allowed to eat a grape [or bunch of grapes] with it.” But afterward? “Well, afterward, when daily wages stop, we shall presumably have to go hungry.”

We now noticed, on a bench in the corner of the hut, a fever patient (and these fevers, like another customary illness belonging to the region, are here called febbre di fame, hunger-fever), languishing helplessly. Meanwhile the women working in the vineyards also came back, driven in by the rain. To garnish their meager bread they brought wild chicory, whose roots they ate with it. In this way they eat all kinds of wild-growing herbs; meat they never see, nor milk [p. 17] nor eggs; for one does not see poultry, and there is no cow far around. There are two of them in the town of Albano, and the richest grass rots by the millions of hundredweights all around, polluting the air with its exhalations. When they hear that there are countries in which the landlords take care of their peasants, they throw up their hands in astonishment. Our porter from Albano, who drives the donkeys, is a young fellow of 25 and looks like a debilitated man of 50, because for the last two years, when the French and insurgents plundered him, he has had the hunger fever each year. He once said to me: “Ah! If I could only become a dog and run after the little Madame, with her the dogs are undoubtedly better off than the people with us!” The sight of all these half-starved, debilitated horses, hinnies, donkeys and dogs, is another lamentable scene which broods over these regions with darkened wings. Only the thieving cats are well off. But though the neglected rich meadows offer an abundance of nourishment, since the grass and hay are so strengthening that the beasts of burden could rely on it for their daily work, the inhabitants are too lacking in strength and spirit to benefit in remoter [p. 18] localities. But in the near neighborhood everything is always quickly grazed bare.
To end this alarming picture of misery with a single brush stroke, I must, alas! add that these starving people are quite without hope. They now await with dull passivity a winter of hunger like the two last ones, and count on their government as little as on a stone. At the mention of the Pope, they laugh. Pius VI was exclusively occupied with the draining of the Pontine Marshes, the ostentatious monument of his vanity and [the means] of enrichment of his nephews; then there fell upon him and the country the misfortune which everywhere follows on the invasions of the French. The present Pope, Pius VII, is not yet known to the unhappy people by his merit, since, struggling with daily difficulties and hard pressed on every side, he can only with difficulty turn aside new misfortunes but is in no position to make good the past. And yet he has taken one celebrated and necessary step: he has discontinued the grain and oil monopoly of the Papal Chamber. But it is only in conjunction with free grain import and export that this great step forward [p. 19] can enjoy its full success, and also with strict oversight of the grain profiteers; for now, instead of the Pope, as formerly, seeing to a fair average price for bread, the rich proprietors hold back the grain, even buy it up, and the honest intention of the good Pope, who denies himself everything, is nullified; the people hunger as before. For the moral condition of this poor populace, a very sad effect of the Frankish invasion, which inundated this country like a wild stream and left behind only the signs of devastation, is that with impudent mind they tore aside the veil of many a comforting illusion, without their barren irreligiosity having substituted the truth which was itself foreign to them. In this way the Pope has acquired for his people the character, in the mind of many individuals, of a continuing entity under whose powerlessness they receive the benediction instead of bread, and under whose rule, unnoticed by the owners, who are as pitiless as they are uncomprehending, they are sucked dry to their very blood at second and third hand and then given over to starvation.

This sudden intrusion of true and false concepts, wildly mixed up together, has put in circulation among the lower classes many ideas [p. 20] which had been quite foreign to them. But up to now it is only belief that has been weakened, without superstition having been destroyed.

Among honorable and educated people there now seems to be in all Europe only one opinion about the simple foundations of the immortal rights of morally free human beings. But to these truly cultivated people, the upper classes in the Roman state belong more seldom than in any other land known to me; although again, in Rome, the highest [class], the high clergy, is, at least, very circumspect and on the whole very enlightened. But it has only too many reasons for remaining silent and keeping its own counsel (des Ansichhaltens). The middle class includes warm and well-informed patriots; but the timid caution which is the most conspicuous character trait of the new Romans (and the dominant one in every hierarchy) forbids any bold or loud utterance. And a pope is perhaps of all European potentates the one to whose ears the truth penetrates with most difficulty. As a result of this agnostic discouragement, none of those naive folk songs are any longer heard in the evening before the little house altars of the saints and the Madonna, and this gentle mediatrix, whom in 1795 we heard so heartily [p. 21] called upon by the poor populace in any impending need, has lost much of its credit. Ah! may one never take, without giving in return! Now the poor young women, with their fine black Hesperian eyes,
smile patiently but hopelessly in the face of misery. Another particular source of distress for me is the appearance of the children; of every five, three are rickety; of ten, seven are deathly pale, hollow-eyed, obese, as want and bad nourishment make them. Depopulation, in the whole Roman Campagna from Viterbo to Velletri, from Civita-Vecchia to beyond Subiaco (I speak only of those parts of the Roman states that I know intimately) is going downhill in such a breathtaking progression that one says to oneself with trembling: this people could die out, and the name of Roman no longer have any representative on earth.* We all yearn unspeakably for Rome, where one now lives more for the past than for the present; for what here particularly tears the heart as it were in pieces, is the contrast between the benignant heaven, the most fruitful earth, the most luxuriant vegetation, and a people for which all these gifts of nature seem to become a curse. For although in the years between [p. 22] our second and third stays in Italy (from [i.e., between] 1803 [and] 1807), the scale of the sad fate of the inhabitants of the Roman Campagna, and of the population of the hills which encompass them on all sides, sank or rose in greater or lesser measure, the situation of this land in the middle of the lap of civilized Europe—indeed, bordered first of all, on both sides, by lands in one of which (Tuscany) agriculture and population have reached a very high level, [while] in the other (the Neapolitan) the latter [i.e., population] in the lowlands is excessive—is and remains an object of reflection that ever and again claims the most sympathetic attention. The constantly recurring distress of these depopulated lands, often after only brief intervals, is proof of a deep-rooted hidden fault, for in the years 1816 and 1817, in which no particular adversity afflicted the fair land, there prevailed in the hills (in Monticelli, in the hill villages between Tivoli and Subiaco, etc.) such distress that many inhabitants once again became victims of starvation. But in these empty regions, unlike the situation in overcrowded manufacturing towns, this is not a result of too many, but of too thinly distributed inhabitants. [p. 23] Between Rome and Ostia, Laurentum, Ardea etc., no single loaf of bread is baked, though all these fields could boast the richest gifts of Ceres, if arms were available to turn the rich earth. Now, all the bread to which these widely scattered desert settlers are entitled comes from Rome.* To ascertain the reason for this degeneration, desertification, and depopulation, it is not sufficient, indeed it would be unjust, to blame everything on the present owners, the present government; for failing to apply long since those means, until recently the only serviceable means toward the improvement of a situation which excludes this famous portion of the ecclesiastical state from the line of the civilized states of Europe. But slowly, ah, only very slowly can any single step toward the improvement in its efficacy appear; for it was from the deep past, slowly downward, that this land sank into desolation, and perhaps this process began already in the last period of the Roman Republic, at the moment of its greatest power and flashing brilliance, growing unnoticed under the splendid reign of the Caesars, as the hidden cancer of destruction gnawed at the heart of the land, deep hidden under all the monuments of luxury. [p. 24] All Central Italy had at first become a fairyland adorned with splendid monumental landscaping, gardens, airy groves, theaters, amphitheaters, temples, populated by a teeming army of slaves and proud gentlemen, [while] the healthy population of the land, its agricultural sector was decreasing constantly; for ever more and more, on the rich soil of Italy, where such a small area satisfies the needs of a frugal populace, the smaller and beneficent dwellings of the rural population were more and more squeezed by the large properties and ostentatious, unproductive layouts which, already in
Horace’s time, extended into the very sea, and whose remnants one still sees everywhere, along the barren coast between Civita-Vechia and Terracina, when one leaves the banks and rows along the shoreline, as splendid survivals shimmering in the lap of the flood.

This outwardly brilliant situation, which, if I am not mistaken, was already lamented by the elder Pliny, was followed by the transfer of the seat of government to Constantinople, and soon thereafter began the succession of centuries during which the monstrous colossus of Roman power and greatness, at first slowly bending, then falling ever more steeply from its dizzy height, covered Italy and, indeed, half the world with its debris. More abandoned and torn than any of the cities and provinces of Italy seems the Queen of the World, as, after the centuries of dissolution and fecundation to new life (as happened to the cities and republics of the Middle Ages in Lombardy and Tuscany) so large a part of the splendid peninsula raised itself from its ruins to a finer existence than Rome’s hegemony had ever permitted: the Eternal City with its territory, burdened by fame, remains in deep mourning, and the avenging Nemesis rules over it with the strict measure of retaliation and the sharp whip of chastisement.* Yet even Rome eventually, under the humble defense of its holy bishops (often martyrs of faith and freedom at the same time), rises out of the dust and ashes, painfully struggles to its feet, ever and again lacerated by the hand of its own children, and appears now as ruler over minds and spirits, and proceeds through this immeasurable sovereignty, more powerful than ever, triumphing, scattering treasure, from out its ruins. But only the Eternal City rises, shining anew, from out the ruins of the centuries. From a new Capitol, which now rules also the spirits of a new world, it sends out its lightning bolts over a world enchain’d—but no blessing on the mourning fields round about. As lonely ruler of the deserts rests the only city, surrounded far and wide by a depopulated or, as the distance increases, merely impoverished wilderness, and only at the borders of the territory which bears her proud name on a grieving brow, a happy and prosperous life begins anew to cheer the lands of Central Italy, favored as they are by the blessing of a mild heaven and a fruitful earth.

Visit to the site where Alba Longa once stood, with Fernow and Zoega. The Capuchin monastery of Palazzola with its views.

Our dear friends Zoega and Fernow came happily climbing our hill today, to announce to us that the desired dwelling in Rome has been found, namely in the Villa di Malta on the brow of the Pincian Hill, in the rooms once occupied by Amalia of Weimar (the Mnemosyne of the Muses’ Choir, which her motherly care once assembled around her) and by Herder. [p. 27] and where I, like them, can look down from the little garden into Angelika Kaufmann’s flower-scented sanctuary and give and receive a friendly greeting; where Zoega lives near me, and where I, from evergreen shadows and gracious solitude, can oversee the greatest part of the Eternal City.* In our universally happy mood we decided to make a pilgrimage to the present Capuchin monastery of Palazzola, which in Zoega’s opinion (and what other opinion would outweigh his?) lies on the site of the old Latin federal queen (Bundes-Königin), Alba-Longa. Seven years ago, when I took this to me unforgettable route, all commercial timber in the vicinity had just been cut; but the whole amphitheater (whose arena is the lake) was hung with
greening flower-carpets; for it was in May and fragrance was everywhere. Now, the tall shrubbery already cast a shadow, and descended like vaulting from one to another of the narrowing lake-shore ledges, deepened and formed by volcanic eruptions. Beneath the cool shadows shone in single bouquets the lovely cyclamen and some late remnants of summer vegetation. The many grottos, in part spontaneously formed and in part vaulted through the emergence [p. 28] of puzzolana and peperino, reveal a thousand beauties; for the cryptogamous plants love these damp grottos, from which a little silver thread often trickles, and adorn and decorate them from within with the bright green of their fantastically formed leaves, while from the outside the ivy, entwining them with strong arms, luxuriantly clothes them with the fullness of its serrated leafage. Who knows whether Numitor and Amulius did not hollow out these caves in order to create their dwellings out of the stonework?

The boscage smelled cool. The oak, chestnut, nut and elm trees are still summer-green; only the wild grapes, charmingly wandering as in semi-intoxication, already flaunt the purple and lemon colors of autumn in the dark shadows. I should never grow tired of wandering beneath these leafy vaults and looking into these rounded depths, circled by gentle shudders. Before ascending the last clifflike approach to the cloister, there is a deep grotto on the right, beneath a powerfully abrupt cliff wall crowned by a cool boscage (Fläminggebüscht). It [the grotto] is high and roomily vaulted. Heavy columns support and separate the powerful arches. One can think of nothing more grandiose than [p. 29] its openings to the wood and to the lake; nothing more charming than the views when one is inside. Vaults, columns and floor are adorned on the sunny side with a veil of the lightly woven adiantum, and on the shady side as though breathed upon with many-colored moss. On the ground, the bright green plants longingly turn their tender heads out of the darkness to the light. At the entrance to the grotto, a white marble chest catches a richly bubbling, air-bright spring water. Surely this grotto was once sacred to the nymph of the beautiful spring. Hither came the daughters of Alba-Longa to wash their shining garments, or to fetch water in beautifully formed vessels; song and sweet girl-chatter once resounded in this lovely spot, now bathed in tremors of memory.

Soon the last height was reached and we stood before the cloister, which with its buildings, the church and the garden walls, extends its long and narrow body along the narrow edge between the towering cliff wall and the plunging depth of the lake. But why do the lake, the shore, the cliff walls, even the imposing summit of the Alban mountain, in short, everything that surrounds me, seem [p. 30] smaller and lower? Probably because my imagination has had seven years in which to wrap everything in the enlarging veil of the past. Only the holy, majestic and awesome greatness of the Alps eludes her boldest webs of magic, [as do] the endless billowing fullness of the sea and the dread boundlessness of the starry heaven. From the long and narrow garden that extends between the rising cliffs and the sinking depths, one can see, sitting on the wall, into the greenish mirroring surface of the lake and, beyond its funnel-edge, between the towering peaks of Castel-Gandolfo and Marino’s charming groves, into the broad open Campagna, and we would even have seen Rome had not mists prevailed there.
In this cloister I would like to enjoy a villeggiatura, as the artists so often do. On the abruptly rising cliff wall of the garden, the outside of the grave of a Roman consul has been hewn out, a rough bas-relief. Our Zoega’s practiced hawk’s eye recognized and explained to us: six bundles of fasci on either side, [are] lined up like a frontispiece—[p. 31] colonnade; in the middle stands the sella curulis [magistrate’s seat], and next to it the scepter with the eagle.

The Festival of All Souls.

It begins with the first day of November, and, among the sorrowful manifestations which here surround us, has a particularly gruesome character. Everywhere resounds the hollow “per le povere anime del purgatorio.” Ah, and the miserable creatures who besiege our house in troops themselves look so pale, emaciated and shadowy that worthier representatives of the inhabitants of Purgatory could hardly be found. They beg at the same time for money for the relief of the languishing souls and for bread for the living. I found two young sisters here in the house, one of whom, employed by a comfortable family, was blooming and well-nourished; the other, less fortunate, had experienced all the suffering of the hungry years and bore their traces in her pale face, the lips which barely covered her long snow-white teeth, and a certain greedy look in her dark eyes. I took this poor Luzia into the house for the duration of my stay, in order to fatten her up if possible. Both came to ask alms [p. 32] “per le povere anime,” which they both received. The pale, sick one went immediately to the church to deliver the gift for the soul-mass of her mother’s spirit to the Capuchin monks, who are now receiving a rich harvest despite the hunger and the French enlightenment. But the red-cheeked one whispered to Bonstetten: “I don’t want to be a fool and give the money to the fat monks, but will rather buy myself sugar-beans.” But sugared beans are an indulgence that belongs to this festival. So here the fake enlightenment has brought lies and hard-heartedness in its wake. For in the first place, she herself certainly only half believed in the inefficacy of the soul-masses to be read, and the dishonesty of the monks; and secondly, her relations were all in dire need. Poor Luzia I did not succeed in restoring in any degree during the month of my stay in Albano. She ate a lot, but without thriving, although I secured for her light but nourishing food, and in the following winter she was deathly ill with the fever.

While as long as day lasts all nature seems to share in the dismal feast of shadows, and Notus [the south wind] with strong pinions drives heavy clouds, round as Mongolfieren, over [p. 33] the Campagna to our hills—each of which empties its urn upon us before landing on the summit of the Alban Mountains, and the sun itself in the intervals sends out only pale rays—the church of Albano each evening shines brightly illuminated; it is true that the interior is hung with black and decorated with skeletons, but the high altar is one mass of light, and full music rings out. Here too the art of illumination employed is quite remarkable. The whole interior appears transfigured, and the church doubled in size. The Host floats in the brightness, and the half-starved swarms of beggars forget their misery in the festal sight. And now the Capuchin gives a truly poetical and enthusiastic address, of which the following passage has stayed by me:

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6This is the Italian term for an autumnal stay in the country.
“Imagine all the flames of Aetna united in a single burning point, and I say to you that if you came into this from the fire of Purgatory, you would think you were wandering beneath the shadows of a fresh woodland, by cool springs. Now, in this glow, in comparison with which all earthly fire is actually cooling, languishes your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your wife, your daughter, your son! You can assuage their pains through a small gift, and you would fail them?” — After the speech was heard a soft [p. 34] complaining music, which little by little rose to cheerfulness as it seemed to dissolve in the sky. On the wings of tone and in the glow of the high altar one seemed to see the redeemed souls floating.

Whoever in such circumstances did not give the shirt from their body, and the last bite from their mouth, must indeed have a heart of stone. And Bonstetten and I said softly to each other, “certainly not we.” But a feeling does lie deep in the interior of the human soul, which whispers to us that we, as we go and stand [i.e., as we are constituted], are incapable of entering upon a higher order of things; and since it is almost impossible for the sensual human being to imagine a condition of being denuded and freed from all bodily substance and sense impressions, so the idea of purgatory, i.e., of a purifying transition into a higher state of being, is one of the most natural, as it was probably one of the most predominant in the most venerable and sacred mysteries of antiquity. And it seems to me that only the great word from the Cross: “Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise!” can comfortingly soothe us Christians. So it was not with cold smiles that we attended this festival, which in its origins is very human and spiritual; but with deep sorrow over the misuse and the [p. 35] dishonoring thought that through money, here as there, the consequences of sins can be averted and eternal justice bribed: but prayers for the dear dead, confidently directed to eternal mercy, are for the souls of the living a beautiful offering of true unforgetting love, and, moreover, are often brought by the better people.

The lost ones on the journey to Rocca di Papa.

The late autumn, or rather the second spring of this magnificent land, had appeared in its mildly touching beauty; the air had purified itself more each day, and the breast oppressed by the preceding Scirocco mists inhaled this light ether of life with voluptuous appreciation. We rode first [along] the romantically lonely footpath below Castel-Gandolfo between the towering heights and the headlong crater depth of the lake. The air was warm and life-giving, all plants released their fragrance; on the ridge before Marino we saw the sea encompassing the brownish Campagna like a silver girdle. How proudly shows itself what is evidently the only pine grove, from the airy hilltop and the high gardens of the Pope, like a fantasy picture united in a classically [p. 36] beautiful whole with the palace and the fine cathedral. How deeply shudders the lake, its surface scarcely ruffled between its half-shadowed kettle-banks. How venerably the old Alban mountain raises its wood-crowned head, backed by little shining clouds. With astonishment the mind plumbs the abyss of [the mountain’s] past, its formation through volcanic eruptions which antedate all history, and yet whose traces offer us all these cliffs and shores and