

Transcribed
17 Dec 1978

Letter from Grace Ott, June 26, 1909, from Rome

To Raymond
Neva, in Salina

Dear Neva - We are in Rome at last - In Rome! The city of the Caesars - of Nero, of Pompey, of Cicero, of The Popes and the head of the Catholic church, of the Forum, of the coliseum, of Saint Peters, of the Vatican! The city that was once the head of the whole world! The ride from Naples was beautiful and dotted here and there with wonderful old ruins. And 7 'o clock [sic] finds us comfortably located in Pension Boos. We are just across the street from the Royal Palace and the Royal Bank - but I must stop right here and go to bed because we must waste no time in Rome and rest we have to have. Sunday June 27 - This morning we hired an English guide and did the Formum [sic- Forum] Romanum another of those indescribable things that I have been telling you so much about. When we came to the Rostra [?] we all mounted and Mr. Van delivered Mark Antonies oration and then had our pictures taken - He was standing on the very top just going [sic - doing] it when Miss B. snapped. We also took pictures of us in front of the Arch of Severus and [ampersand] Titus. I will not try to describe what ~~we~~^{we} saw there because you know well enough what is there. One thing that amazes me is the vandlism of the popes. They have actually taken the marble and columns out of the forum to build other [here an apparently superfluous symbol that looks like 1 or 2] buildings. It is just as our guide says - "What the barbarians didn't do to destroy Rome, the church did. [No close quotes.] From the Forum we went to the Capatoline museum. Here we saw the originals of "The Dying Gladiator", "Venus of the Capital [?]" and [ampersand] "The Faun of Praxitiles" and "the Bronze Wolf of the Capital. [No close quotes.]

By this time it was noon and so we went back home and rested until 5 o'clock. In this climate you have to be very careful or you get the Roman fever. We make it a point not to be out in the heat of the day. At five we took carriages and drove over part of the city. When passing the fountain of Trevi [?] a beautiful and massive structure, where the guide told us if we would throw a penny in we would come to Rome again. We all threw our pennys. Past the Forum of Trajan and the tower of Marcus Aurelius we drove. There are two columns one is [?] erected in honor of Trajan and one in honor of Marcus Aurelius. Some pope had those statues removed and those of Peter and Paul put up. He had more religious zeal than [sic - than] good taste it seems to me. From here we proceeded to the Pincian [? Caelian?] Hill. It is made beautiful by columns, statues, marble bas-reliefs and tropical plants and trees. A winding road lined with mimosas leads up to the highest part of the hill now laid out in public drives and gardens. The guide said that here the ghost of Nero used to wander. I didn't see it. Below this hill spreads the "Eternal City. [No close quotes.] This park is a favorite rendezvous for nobles and there were a few driving around up there but they didn't look [?] any better than a Salina South ^{Santa Fer} ~~Santa Fer~~ [sic] or a New York Broadway turnout [?]. They all had bells on their horses to attract attention I suppose. But I just saw noble women not any noblemen so I'm still looking.

Monday June 28. This morning mamma woke up with a headache - but she insisted on us going anyway. So we took our dinners and left her to the care of the chambermaid who she said was very good to her. We went to the Vatican - The Vatican is under the absolute rule of the Pope. When he was deprived of Temporal Power the Italian government gave to him that territory for his very own and also an

offer of, I forget how many a millions ^{a year. The} ~~of people~~ the Pope refused it because he tho't that that would be submitting to temporal power and now he confines himself to the vatican which he never leaves, declaring himself a prisoner. The Vatican contains probably one of the most splendid art collections in the world. You can get some idea of its size when I tell you that it has 11,000 rooms. It is called the largest palace in the world and here lives the pope. I will not attempt a description. We saw some of the most noted art in the world though. The original of "Laocöon" groupe and "Apollo Belvedere", "The Hercules Belvedere", "the disk thrower", "Perseus with head of Medusa". We did not spend our time on anything but the masterpieces. When we came to them we sat down before each one and read what our guide books said and looked at them. Then we went down into the Sistine Chapel which contains Michael Angelo's famous "Last Judgement. [No close quotes.] Mrs. Van and I sat before it for a solid half hour looking. The ceilings are covered with paintings of Michael Angelo representing the beginning of the world. "The Creation of the World", "The Creation of Adam", "The Creation of Eve [?]", "The Temptation and the Expulsion from Paradise". (in one picture the upper side walls were covered [?] with paintings on one side of the life of Christ and on the other the life of Moses. These were by Florentine masters - Perügino, Ghirlandajo and their pupils. [No close parenthesis.] The great church of Saint Peters is in front of the Vatican and ^{after eating} ~~after eating~~ our lunch we went there - It is a church over 400 years old, but it looks like it was built yesterday. It is the greatest (largest) edifice ever erected by man for religious purposes. It contains the body of Saint Peter in fact the church was built for that purpose. Its

great dome 580 feet high is the redeeming feature of the whole building. The architecture is beautiful but the ornaments are gaudy and spoil the grand simplicity of it. For instance - great fluted columns support the roof all around the inside of the building. These beautiful Corinthian columns they have covered with red silk and gold hangings. It is rich and gaudy but not beautiful. The most renowned sculpture is Michael Angelo's -"Piete"- but it has been severely criticized because the Virgin Mary is so much larger than her son whom she holds in her lap. Today (the 29th) was a great feast day at St. Peters. Nearly all the shops were closed because nearly all Rome is Catholic. High mass was said there. Some of the girls went but The Van de Marks and us took carriages and drove out the Appian way, past the gate of Sebastion and about an hours ride to the Catacombs of San Callixtus. These catacombs we were told by a priest are excavated under an area of 32 acres. Here was where the early Christians hid and buried the martyrs in times of persecution. There were 13 miles of passage ways on the floor we were on. There are three floors of them beneath the surface of the ground. We were all given a wax taper and lead by an old monk, taken down a stairway and entered the halls. On either side of the narrow passageways were small rooms and crypts. The tombs of the martyrs were always arched. The priest told us that after the Christians had been thrown to the wild beasts in the Coliseum the Christians were allowed to steal away their bones and here they brot them. The tombs of the martyrs were used as altars by them and are yet by the monks and [ampersand] priests in the convent. I learned something today that I did not before know. A Cath. priest can not say mass except over the relics of the departed saints.

There were bones of the saints still to be seen. Sometimes the sarchofigi were covered with glass. Some were mummies, others were merely the bones and hair left. From here we visited the church San Pedro in Vinculo. (Saint Peter in chains.) Here they have what they claim are the original chains with which St. Peter was bound. They lit an alter before them and then the doors slowly opened and inside of a gold casket were the chains. In this same church is Michael Angelo's wonderful statue of Moses. We saw the Mamertine Prison the other day in which Peter and Paul were supposed to have been imprisoned and the very stocks were shown us. ^{he} Whether all these things are true is questionable. Papa insists that there is no biblical proff whatever to show that Peter was ever in Rome. But if it is not true the Cathpolic church is practicing a great deception on its people. This afternoon we visited San Giovanni Cathedral. Here in an adjacent chapel are the "Sancta scala" (sacred stairway) bro't from the palace of Pilate in Jerusalem. These were the stairs which Christ ascended when he left the Hall when he was crucified. The stairs are marble 28 of them and they have become so worn by pilgrims ascending that they have been covered with wood. No ~~one~~ can ascend them except on the knees. It was here that Luther was converted. He was crawling these stairs on this [sic] knees when the words came to him "The just shall live by faith" and he stood up and walked boldly down again and went back to Germany to start the great Reformation. We crawled up on our knees just for the experience. But I'll tell you it dide'nt seem a bit ridiculous to us when we tho't what all had happened on those stairs. But the ridiculous part of it is that the cath church by

order of some Pope grants 9 years' indulgence (that is 9 years of forgiveness of sins) for every step ascended. This indulgence can be applied both to the living or to those gone to purgatory and in danger of hell!!! How the pope got this authority is more than I can say. Now you see I can be wicked for nine years to come.

This hotel we are staying in is part of a palace Rospigliosi and in this very building is the famous painting of Guido Reni - The Aurora (a print of which is on the top of this sheet.) It is one of the greatest pictures in the world). [parens sic] We are going to see it after supper. I am almost afraid to go out on the streets here. Everbody turns and gauks at you like you were a curiosity shop. But I guess we are as strange to them as they are to us. Everywhere you go you hear whispers of "Americano Americano." I guess we have our ear marks. I can tell an American the minute I see him. I saw one on the street the other day and I nearly spoke to him before I realized that I really dide'nt know him. Rome is just like any modern city. The ancient ruins are all mixed up with what is modern. Yesterday we visited the Pantheon. It was originally a Pagan temple but the statues of the Pagan gods have been replaced by those of Christian saints and martyrs. Raffaele is buried here, also the late King Victor Immanuel who was assassinated in 1900. The dome is beautiful but the Popes have dispoiled it by taking away all the beautiful bronze with which it was originally covered, to make statues and decorate Saint Peter's church. Again I had the vaddalism [spelling unclear] of those old Popes impressed on me. They spoiled one beautiful building to make another. The dome now is bare plaster and looks very plain beside the rest of the building. Wed. We spent another morning in the Vatican and

went over all the wonderful paintings and statues with as much pleasure as we did the first time. Mamma had not seen them yet so we went with her. In addition we saw Raffaele's wonderful "Transfiguration". It is the most beautiful of all we have seen to my notion. The coloring is wonderful. In the same gallery were - Marattas, Guidos, Guercines, and more Raffaelles. In the afternoon we went shopping and I bought some beautiful ostrich plumes - One for you and one for me - great big white ones and ridiculously cheap. We would have had to pay at least \$8 for them at home and I got them for 20 francs that is \$4.00 Now next winter we can be alike. I also got some Roman pearl hatpins and one Roman pearl necklace. Thurs. This morning we spent on the Capotoline Hill in the Museum. There we saw the famous "Dying Gladiator" again. I never will [?] get thru' looking at it.

Tomorrow we leave Rome. It makes me feel bad to think of it because there is so much more to see. But it would take a year or more to see all so we must be contented. There will always be one unpleasant memory connected with our stay here - The Flees - and as I pen my thots (or only part of them) my other hand is never idle the while. As I read over these pages I almost pity you and wonder whether it is as hard for you to read my writing as it is for me. I received your letter here - also one from Hattie and it made me feel like I wase'nt 8000 miles from home any more. Tomorrow we go to Florence - where I hope I will get some more. My nose is now getting its third coat pf skin from the sunburn - so you may not know me when I get home. We are all as brown as berries from being in

Rome, 8

the sun so much. This is a very abbreviated chronicle and I feel like I have not told you half - in fact I couldn't tell you all if I would write all day.

Good-bye little chum - Don't forget me

Grace