

Pencion Marcelli, 5744

71, Via della Croce, Roma

Italia - Dec. 9<sup>th</sup> 1880

My dear Elira,

I have been looking each day this week for a card with your new address, but nothing has arrived, and I am afraid now either that a letter or card has gone astray, or that something more than the bustle of removing has kept you or the others from sending me word. I hope the former - for after that attack you had the week before leaving Malvern I could hardly hope to hear that you had got through all the commotion of settling into the Liverpool house without breaking down to some extent. I sent two cards this morning - one to Malvern, and the other to Liverpool, on the chance of its finding you. If you are ill or anything is the matter, and Mr. Stephenson telegraphed, I could come straight back in about three days - But I do not want to think that my not hearing is anything more than accidental delay one way or another.

It has been raining here the last week. Almost every day has been wet, but there is enough to be done and seen under cover in Rome, and I have

made good use of my time. This week there has been the great Festival of the Immaculate Conception, and the Churches dedicated to the Virgin in Rome have out-done themselves in the splendour of their celebration. On the day that was Tuesday, I went to the Church of the Gesù. It was very beautiful. The Ave Maria was sung by a choir a great height up, and nothing could be more lovely than the sound falling down, softened by the distance. The Church belongs to the Jesuits, and certainly they seem to understand the art of making their Religion attractive and imposing. The vast building was lit up from end to end with, I should think, nearly a thousand wax candles, in crystal chandeliers, which were suspended in immense festoons all about the upper end of the Church, and down the nave, and before every altar, and in a dazzling wreath around the image of the Virgin which stands over the high altar. The dresses of the priests were magnificent, all glistening with jewels and gold embroidery. Amidst it all the very poorest of the people were kneeling side by side with the rich and well-born. There

is absolutely no distinction of rank or riches, so far as the worshippers in the Churches are concerned. Yesterday afternoon I went to the Church of the Trinità di Monti, where the nuns sing the service. I was there on Sunday, which is the only day when as a rule there is afternoon service, but yesterday being a Feast the Church was open, and I was very glad, for it is hardly like anything quite earthly, and I could have the quiet hour there, thinking of the passing of the same hour the Wednesday of last year. The whole of the Choir is filled with the white-veiled figures, seen indistinctly beyond the lattice work that screens it from the rest of the Church. The altar and all about it was dazzling with white and gold, and crimson draperies, and quantities of exquisite pure white flowers. The whole of the service is sung by the nuns, to soft organ music. The only words I could distinguish were Ave Maria, which came many times over - beatissima, and sanctissima. I wished you could have been there. The behaviour of a Catholic congregation is so full apparently of faith, and so reverent and decorous, that there is nothing, as in most English Churches, to detract from the impressiveness, and the sing-

ing of the music was sweet beyond de-  
scription. It was like listening to a re-  
quiem sung within the gates of heaven  
or to music in a dream. This morning  
after I had been to the post I went to  
the Ara-Celi, one of the very ancient of  
the Roman church. It is a dim faded  
& gorgeous church, thick with monuments  
and ancient chapels. There were two or  
three poor people kneeling about it here  
and there, and some Franciscan monks  
chanting a Mass for the Dead - partly  
at the High Altar, partly in the centre  
of the nave, where they stood with long  
wax candles in their hands. In a church  
close by is a crypt which was originally  
the Mamertine prison, and where in all  
probability Paul was confined when he  
was a prisoner in Rome. I thought  
how interested Mammer would have  
been in seeing what, amid much that  
is mere tradition, is authentic. There is  
something in Rome that one feels nowhere  
else. I hope you will come some day.  
Give my love to all. You will be getting  
quite "settled in" by now. I wonder what  
the work and people will be like. Has  
Mr Stephen got a Curate yet? -

Your afft

Mary Catharine Tabor.