inspiring her to want to live a life worthy of such a place, this historic repository of centuries of sensual and spiritual experience. Though she describes many places with affection, the letter of November 1847 mentions the splendid PIAZZA DEL POPOLO and PIAZZA NAVONA glanceingly, as mere references en route to the heart of the city: SAINT PETER’S—the PIAZZA, the BASILICA, the PIETÀ. Though an Anglican Christian, she only expresses reverence toward this monument of Roman Catholicism.

At sunrise, she first stood awed in “the enormous Atrio”—her words for Piazza San Pietro. Another of Bernini’s masterpieces, it is distinguished by two COLONNADES of 284 columns and 140 statues; the OBELISK with a cross on top, in the center of the piazza (originally brought from Alexandria and placed in a Roman circus by Caligula); and two FOUNTAINS, their waters flowing abundantly. The interior of The Basilica, the largest church in the world, has its quiet spaces, depending on the season. Florence Nightingale’s first visit in November was propitious. In the winter months the place is peaceful and its wonders—the Pietà; Bernini’s BALDACCHINO over the high altar, decorated with the BARBERINI BEES; the colored marble of his walls and floor; Michelangelo’s DOME—seem radiant in the afternoon sunlight touching the stone columns and visitors.

The ASCENT OF THE DOME, by elevator and stairs, leading first to a close-up view of the mosaics inside the cupola, and then to the roof to see the huge statues of the apostles on top of the façade (as if protecting the life in the piazza below them), and finally up to the LANTERN with its magnificent view of Rome, is, without qualification, worth every strenuous step. This perspective on the city and its river, never to be forgotten, raises the question of what “a sense of place” can actually mean to the experience of an individual traveler. (In his description of the climb in his Italian Journey, Goethe, too, remembers great beauty. So, too, does Margaret Fuller—see page 187—in her letters.)

And, though it wasn’t open in the nineteenth century, the well-preserved NECROPOLIS with ST. PETER’S TOMB beneath the basilica may now be seen. Again, in winter, one may join a group by entering through the Swiss-guarded gate to the left of the basilica and applying at the UFFICIO SCAVI (excavation office) on the right. In high-

Margaret Fuller

“Had I only come ten years earlier,” Margaret Fuller wrote Emerson from Rome in 1847. After leaving New England (and Puritanism and Transcendentalism) for New York in the 1840s, the first self-supporting American woman journalist had then traveled to Italy as a reporter for the New York Tribune. There she covered the war for the Roman Republic and worked as a nurse during the city’s bombardment by the French and its defense by Garibaldi and his red-shirted army. The articles she sent back to America—collected under the title These Sad But Glorious Days: Dispatches from Europe 1846–1850—are now considered the best writing she ever did. Her Woman in the Nineteenth Century, respected by European intellectuals when it was published in 1843, remains an important feminist text. (Emerson and Hawthorne, by turns, patronized and ridiculed her.) Her personal history in Italy coincided with the momentum of upheaval. With her lover, Giovanni Angelo Ossoli, she had a son whom she kept hidden during the war in a mountain village of Umbria.

A few years earlier she’d written in her journal: “Once I was almost all intellect; now I am almost all feeling. Nature vindicates her rights, and I feel all Italy glowing beneath the Saxon crust. This cannot last long; I shall burn to ashes if all this smoulders here much longer.” When they returned to America in 1850, after the defeat of the republican army and the exile of
Mazzini and Garibaldi, she and Ossoi and baby Angelo drowned in a shipwreck within sight of land off the coast of Long Island.

FROM DISPATCHES FROM EUROPE TO THE NEW YORK TRIBUNE, 1846–1850

D I S P A T C H 1 4

R O M E, M A Y 1 8 4 7

There is very little that I can like to write about Italy. Italy is beautiful, worthy to be loved and embraced, not talked about. Yet I remember well that when afar I liked to read what was written about her; now all thought of it is very tedious.

The traveler passing along the beaten track, vetturinoed from inn to inn, ciceroned from gallery to gallery, thrown, through indolence, want of tact, or ignorance of the language, too much into the society of his compatriots, sees the least possible of the country; fortunately, it is impossible to avoid seeing a great deal. The great features of the past pursue and fill the eye.

Yet I find that it is quite out of the question to know Italy; to say anything of her that is full and sweet, so as to convey any idea of her spirit, without long residence, and residence in the districts untouched by the scorch and dust of foreign invasion, (the invasion of the dilettanti I mean,) and without an intimacy of feeling, an abandonment to the spirit of the place, impossible to most Americans; they retain too much of their English blood; and the traveling English, as a tribe, seem to me the most unseen of all possible animals. There are exceptions; for instance, the perceptions and pictures of Browning seem as delicate and just here on the spot as they did at a distance; but, take them as a tribe, they have the vulgar familiarity of Mrs. Trollope without her vivacity, the cockneyism of Dickens without his graphic power and love of the odd corners of human nature. I admired the English at home in their island; I admired their honor, truth, practical intelligence, persistent power. But they do not look well in Italy; they are not the figures for this landscape. I am indignant at the contempt they have presumed to express for the faults of our semi-barbarous state. What is the vulgarity expressed in our tobacco-chewing, and way of eating eggs, compared to that which elbows the Greek marbles, guide-book in hand—chatters and sneers through the Misericere of the Sistine Chapel, beneath the very glance of Michel Angelo’s Sibyls,—praises St. Peter’s as “nice,” talks of “managing” the Colosseum by moonlight,—and snatchers “bits” for a “sketch” from the sublime silence of the Campagna...

I have heard owls hoot in the Colosseum by moonlight, and they spoke more to the purpose than I ever heard any other voice upon that subject. I have seen all the pomp and shows of Holy Week in the Church of St. Peter, and found them less imposing than an habitual acquaintance with the place with processions of monks and nuns stealing in now and then, or the swell of vesper from some side chapel. I have ascended the dome and seen thence Rome and its Campagna, its villas with their cypresses and pines serenely sad as is nothing else in the world, and the fountains of the Vatican Garden gushing hard by. I have been in the Subterranean to see a poor little boy introduced, much to his surprise, to the bosom of the Church; and then I have seen by torchlight the stone Popes where they lie in their tombs, and the old mosaics, and Virgins with gilt caps. It is all rich and full,—very impressive in its way. St. Peter’s must be to each one a separate poem. . . .

D I S P A T C H 1 9

R O M E, D E C. 1 7, 1 8 4 7

This seventeenth day of December I rise to see the floods of sunlight blessing us as they have almost every day since I returned to Rome—two months and more; with scarce three or four days of rainy weather. I see the fresh roses and grapes still each morning on my table, though both these I expect to give up at Christmas.

This autumn is “something like,” as my countrymen say at
home. Like *what*, they do not say, so I always supposed they meant like the ideal standard. Certainly this weather corresponds with mine, and I begin to believe the climate of Italy is really what it has been represented. Shivering here last Spring in an air no better than the cruel east wind of Puritan Boston, I thought all the praises lavished on

Italia, O Italia!* would turn out to be figments of the brain, and that even Byron, usually accurate beyond the conception of plodding pedants, had deceived us when he says you have the happiness in Italy to

See the sun set sure he'll rise to-morrow,

and not according to a view which exercises a withering influence on the enthusiasm of youth in my native land be forced to regard each pleasant day as a "weather-breeder."

How delightful, too, is the contrast between this time and the Spring in another respect! Then I was here, like travelers in general, expecting to be driven away in a short time. Like others, I went through the painful process of sight-seeing, so unnatural everywhere, so counter to the healthful methods and true life of the mind. You rise in the morning knowing there are around you a great number of objects worth knowing, which you may never have a chance to see again. You go every day, in all moods, under all circumstances; you feel, probably, in seeing them, the inadequacy of your preparation for understanding or duly receiving them; this consciousness would be most valuable if you had time to think and study, being the natural way in which the mind is lured to cure its defects—but you have no time, you are always wearied, body and mind, confused, dissipated, sad. The objects are of commanding beauty or full of suggestion, but you have no quiet to let that beauty breathe its life into your soul—no time to follow up these suggestions and plant for your proper harvest. Many persons run about Rome for nine days and then go away; they might as well

*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.*

expect to see it so, as to appreciate the Venus by throwing a stone at it. I stayed in Rome nine weeks and came away unhappy as he who, having been taken in the visions of night through some wondrous realm, wakes unable to recall anything but the hues and outlines of the pageant, the real knowledge, the recreative power induced by familiar love, the assimilation of its soul and substance—all the true value of such a revelation—is wanting, and he remains a poor Tantalus, hungrier even when he most needed to be fed.

No; Rome is not a nine-days' wonder, and those who try to make it such lose the ideal Rome (if they ever had it) without gaining any notion of the real. For those who travel, as they do everything else—only because others do—I do not speak to them; they are nothing. Nobody counts in the estimate of the human race who has no character.

For one, I now really live in Rome, and I begin to see and feel the real Rome. She reveals herself now; she tells me some of her life. Now I never go out to see a sight, but I walk every day, and here I cannot miss of some object of consummate interest to end a walk. In the evenings, which are long now, I am at leisure to follow up the inquiries suggested by the day.

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From 1847 until she left Rome in 1850, Margaret Fuller kept her American readers informed about the rapid developments of the Roman revolution, led by Mazzini and Garibaldi. She also wrote many letters home to friends, including Ralph Waldo Emerson.

DISPATCH 30

ROME, MAY 27, 1849

... The struggle is now fairly, thoroughly commenced between the principle of democracy and the old powers, no longer legitimate. That struggle may last fifty years, and
the earth be watered with the blood and tears of more than one generation, but the result is sure. All Europe, including Great Britain, where the most bitter resistance of all will be made, is to be under republican government in the next century.

God moves in a mysterious way.

Every struggle made by the old tyrannies, all their Jesuitical deceptions, their rapacity, their imprisonments and executions of the most generous men, only sow more dragon’s teeth; the crop shoots up daily more and more plenteous.

When I first arrived in Italy, the vast majority of this people had no wish beyond limited monarchies, constitutional governments. They still respected the famous names of the nobility; they despised the priests, but were still fondly attached to the dogmas and ritual of the Roman Catholic Church. It required King Bomba, the triple treachery of Charles Albert, Pius IX, and the “illustrious Gioberti,” the naturally kind-hearted, but, from the necessity of his position, cowardly and false Leopold of Tuscany, the vagabond “serene” meannesses of Parma and Modena, the “fatherly” Radetzky, and, finally, the imbecile Louis Bonaparte, “would-be Emperor of France,” to convince this people that no transition is possible between the old and the new. *The work is done;* the revolution in Italy is now radical, nor can it stop till Italy becomes independent and united as a republic. Protestant she already is, and though the memory of saints and martyrs may continue to be revered, the ideal of woman to be adored under the name of Mary, yet Christ will now begin to be a little thought of; his idea has always been kept carefully out of sight under the old régime; all the worship being for the Madonna and saints, who were to be well paid for interceding for sinners;—an example which might make men cease to be such, was no way coveted. Now the New Testament has been translated into Italian; copies are already dispersed far and wide; men calling themselves Christians will no longer be left entirely ignorant of the precepts and life of Jesus...  

*All these, in their various roles and for their many betrayals, the republicans considered the enemies of the revolution.*

War near at hand seems to me even more dreadful than I had fancied it. True, it tries men’s souls, lays bare selfishness in undeniable deformity. Here it has produced much fruit of noble sentiment, noble act; but still it breeds vice too, drunkenness, mental dissipation, tears asunder the tenderest ties, lavishes the productions of Earth, for which her starving poor stretch out their hands in vain, in the most unprofitable manner. And the ruin that ensues, how terrible! Let those who have ever passed happy days in Rome grieve to hear that the beautiful plantations of Villa Borghese—that chief delight and refreshment of citizens, foreigners, and little children—are laid low, as far as the obelisk. The fountain, singing alone amid the fallen groves, cannot be seen and heard without tears; it seems like some innocent infant calling and crying amid dead bodies on a field which battle has strewn with the bodies of those who once cherished it. The plantations of Villa Salvage on the Tiber, also, the beautiful trees on the way from St. John Lateran to La Maria Maggiore, the trees of the Forum, are fallen. Rome is shorn of the locks which lent grace to her venerable brow. She looks desolate, profaned. I feel what I never expected to,—as if I might by and by be willing to leave Rome.

Then I have, for the first time, seen what wounded men suffer. The night of the 30th of April I passed in the hospital, and saw the terrible agonies of those dying or who needed amputation, felt their mental pains and longing for the loved ones, who were away; for many of these were Lombards, who had come from the field of Novara to fight with a fairer chance,—many were students of the University, who had enlisted and thrown themselves into the front of the engagement.* The impudent falsehoods of the French general’s despatches are incredible. The French were never decoyed on in any way. They were received with every possible mark of hostility. They were defeated in open field, the Garibaldi legion rushing out to meet them; and though they suffered much from the walls, they sustained themselves nowhere. They never put up a white flag till they wished to surrender. The vanity that strives to cover over these facts is unworthy of men...

*The Janiculum Hill was the scene of the bloodiest fighting.*
But to return to the hospitals; these were put in order, and have been kept so, by the Princess Belgioioso. The princess was born of one of the noblest families of the Milanese, a descendant of the great Trivulzio, and inherited a large fortune. Very early she compromised it in liberal movements, and, on their failure, was obliged to fly to Paris, where for a time she maintained herself by writing, and I think by painting also. A princess so placed naturally excited great interest, and she drew around her a little court of celebrated men. After recovering her fortune, she still lived in Paris, distinguished for her talents and munificence, both toward literary men and her exiled countrymen. Later, on her estate, called Locate, between Pavia and Milan, she had made experiments in the Socialist direction with fine judgment and success. Association for education, for labor, for transaction of household affairs, had been carried on for several years; she had spared no devotion of time and money to this object, loved, and was much beloved by, those objects of her care, and said she hoped to die there. All is now despoiled and broken up, though it may be hoped that some seeds of peaceful reform have been sown which will spring to light when least expected. The princess returned to Italy in 1847–8, full of hope in Pius IX and Charles Albert. She showed her usual energy and truly princely heart, sustaining, at her own expense, a company of soldiers and a journal up to the last sad betrayal of Milan, August 6th. These days undeceived all the people, but few of the noblesse; she was one of the few with mind strong enough to understand the lesson, and is now warmly interested in the republican movement. From Milan she went to France, but, finding it impossible to effect anything serious there in behalf of Italy, returned, and has been in Rome about two months. Since leaving Milan she receives no income, her possessions being in the grasp of Radetzky, and cannot know when, if ever, she will again. But as she worked so largely and well with money, so can she without. She published an invitation to the Roman women to make lint and bandages, and offer their services to the wounded; she put the hospitals in order; in the central one, Trinita di Pellegrini, once the abode where the pilgrims were received during holy week, and where foreigners were entertained by seeing their feet washed by the noble dames and dignitaries of Rome, she has remained day and night since the 30th of April, when the wounded were first there. Some money she procured at first by going through Rome, accompanied by two other ladies veiled, to beg it.

TO RALPH WALDO EMERSON, JUNE 10, 1849

... I received your letter amid the round of cannonade and musketry. It was a terrible battle fought here from the first to the last light of day. I could see all its progress from my balcony. The Italians fought like lions. It is a truly heroic spirit that animates them. They make a stand here for honor and their rights, with little ground for hope that they can resist, now they are betrayed by France.

Since the 30th of April, I go almost daily to the hospitals, and though I have suffered, for I had no idea before how terrible gunshot wounds and wound-fevers are, yet I have taken pleasure, and great pleasure, in being with the men. There is scarcely one who is not moved by a noble spirit. Many, especially among the Lombards, are the flower of the Italian youth. When they begin to get better, I carry them books and flowers; they read, and we talk.

The palace of the Pope, on the Quirinal, is now used for convalescents. In those beautiful gardens I walk with them, one with his sling, another with his crutch. The gardener plays off all his water-works for the defenders of the country, and gathers flowers for me, their friend.

A day or two since, we sat in the Pope’s little pavilion, where he used to give private audience. The sun was going gloriously down over Monte Mario,* where gleamed the white tents of the French light-horse among the trees. The cannonade was heard at intervals. Two bright-eyed boys sat at our feet, and gathered up eagerly every word said by the heroes of the day. It was a beautiful hour, stolen from the midst of ruin and sorrow, and tales were told as full of grace and pathos as in the gardens of Boccaccio, only in a very different spirit,—with noble hope for man, and reverence for woman.

The young ladies of the family, very young girls, were filled with enthusiasm for the suffering, wounded patriots, and they wished to go the hospital, to give their services. Excepting the three

*Beautifully visible from the Gallery of Pius IV in Castel Sant’ Angelo, Monte Mario rises above the Tiber on the northwest outskirts of the city.
superintendents, none but married ladies were permitted to serve there, but their services were accepted. Their governess then wished to go too, and, as she could speak several languages, she was admitted to the rooms of the wounded soldiers, to interpret for them, as the nurses knew nothing but Italian, and many of these poor men were suffering because they could not make their wishes known. Some are French, some Germans, many Poles. Indeed, I am afraid it is too true that there were comparatively few Romans among them. This young lady passed several nights there.

Should I never return, and sometimes I despair of doing so, it seems so far off,—so difficult, I am caught in such a net of ties here,—if ever you know of my life here, I think you will only wonder at the constancy with which I have sustained myself,—the degree of profit to which, amid great difficulties, I have put the time,—at least in the way of observation. Meanwhile, love me all you can. Let me feel that, amid the fearful agitations of the world, there are pure hands, with healthful, even pulse, stretched out toward me, if I claim their grasp.

I feel profoundly for Mazzini. At moments I am tempted to say, "Cursed with every granted prayer,"—so cunning is the demon. Mazzini has become the inspiring soul of his people. He saw Rome, to which all his hopes through life tended, for the first time as a Roman citizen, and to become in a few days its ruler. He has animated, he sustains her to a glorious effort, which, if it fails this time, will not in the age. His country will be free. Yet to me it would be so dreadful to cause all this bloodshed,—to dig the graves of such martyrs!

Then, Rome is being destroyed; her glorious oaks,—her villas, haunts of sacred beauty, that seemed the possession of the world for ever,—the villa of Raphael, the villa of Albani, home of Winckelmans and the best expression of the ideal of modern Rome, and so many other sanctuaries of beauty,—all must perish, lest a foe should level his musket from their shelter. I could not, could not!

I know not, dear friend, whether I shall ever get home across that great ocean, but here in Rome I shall no longer wish to live. O Rome, my country! could I imagine that the triumph of what I held dear was to heap such desolation on thy head!

Speaking of the republic, you say, "Do you not wish Italy had a great man?" Mazzini is a great man. In mind, a great, poetic statesman; in heart, a lover; in action, decisive and full of resource as Caesar. Dearly I love Mazzini. He came in, just as I had finished the first letter to you. His soft, radiant look makes melancholy music in my soul; it consecrates my present life, that, like the Magdalen, I may, at the important hour, shed all the consecrated ointment on his head...

For the Literary Traveler

During the siege of Rome, Margaret Fuller wrote her dispatches about the war and worked in the hospitals with the Principessa Cristina Trivulzio Belgioioso—"the revolutionary princess." Every day they nursed the wounded and dying at the TRINITÀ DEI FELLECRINI (still a hospice) next to the church of the same name (off Via dei Pettinari leading to the Ponte Sisto and Trastevere); and at the FATEBENEFRATELLI ("do good, brothers"). This hospital, founded by monks in 1548, is located on the SOLA TIBERINA, the pretty island in the Tiber shaped like a ship that has been associated with healing since 293 B.C.E. when a temple to the Greek god of healing, Aesculapius, stood here. The two original Roman bridges leading to the island are still intact, and the hospital still occupies most of the island. As the siege began in 1849, Margaret received a note from the Principessa: "Dear Miss Fuller: You are named Regolatrice of the Hospital of the Fatebenefratelli. Go there at twelve if the alarm bell does not ring before... May God help us." A friend described Margaret's ministry with the soldiers: "I have seen the eyes of the dying as she moved among them, meet in commendation of her unwearied kindness. And I have heard those who recovered speak, with all the passionateness and fervor of Italian natures, of her whose sympathy and compassion throughout their long illness fulfilled all the offices of love..." In memory of her service for the cause of Italian freedom, a road on the Janiculum Hill is named the "Viale Margaret Ossoli Fuller."