

The Most Ancient Christian Mosaics.

In the tribune behind the high altar are the most ancient Christian mosaics in existence, which De Rossi held to be also the best. Long before De Rossi's time Panvinio, who lived in the reign of Queen Elizabeth (of virginal memory), declared they were the most beautiful in Rome. Our Lord is shown enthroned, with one arm outstretched in blessing, the other holds a book with the words 'Conservator Ecclesiae Pudentianae' inscribed upon its open page. Beside Him stand the sister saints, Pudentiana and Praxedes, holding wreaths; beneath, but standing forward, are the Princes of the Roman Church, their beloved friends, St. Peter and St. Paul, and other saintly figures, all clad in the garments of classic Rome. In the air, above the head of Christ, is a jewelled cross between the mystic symbols of the Four Evangelists. Behind, through an arcaded portico, are seen intensely interesting presentments of a basilica and baptistery of the day—398-417: for the mosaics were begun by Pope St. Siricius, who is buried in Santa Pudentiana, and finished under St. Innocent I., who reigned from 401 to 417: both Popes ruling the Church after the official conversion of the Empire. St. Pastor, brother of St. Pius I., tells us that when the Senator 'Pudens went to his Saviour,' martyred, as we have seen, by Nero, he left his daughters Pudentiana and Praxedes strengthened with chastity and learned in all the Divine Law. They

Sold Their Goods and Gave the Proceeds to the Poor,

persevered strictly in the love of Christ, and guarded intact the flower of their virginity: for glory they sought only in vigils, fastings and prayers.

Later on they desired to have in their house a baptistery, and the Blessed Pius (Pope St. Pius I.) not only consented but with his own hand made the plan for the baptismal fountain. Besides their house in Rome they must have owned estates out in the country, for St. Pastor says that they called together their slaves from town and country—that is, the house slaves who belonged to the city household and those employed on their lands outside—and gave their freedom to those who were already Christians, and urging the truth of the faith on those who had not yet accepted it. By the Pope's advice the declaration of freedom, with all the ancient usages proper to it, was made in the oratory founded by Pudens, their father: then, at Easter, ninety-six neophytes were baptised: so that thenceforth in that oratory

Constant Gatherings were Held,

and night and day it resounded with hymns of praise. Many of the pagans came thither gladly, and found there the faith and received baptism.

When the Emperor Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138-161) was made aware of all that had taken place he put forth an edict by which all Christians were ordered to live apart in their own houses: they were not to mix with the rest of the people, nor might they go to the public shops, nor frequent the baths. Praxedes and Pudentiana did not now forget those whom they had brought into the Church, but gathered them into their own home and housed them, nourishing them for many days, watching and praying. The blessed Pius himself visited them constantly with joy, offering the Sacrifice for them to the Saviour.

'Then,' says Pastor, 'Pudentiana went to God. Her sister and I wrapped her in sweet perfumes, and kept her hidden in the oratory. Afterwards, at the end of eight-and-twenty days, we carried her to the cemetery of Priscilla, and laid her by her father, Pudens. Novatus, eleven months later, died in his turn: he bequeathed his goods to Praxedes, and she then begged St. Pius to erect a title in the Baths of Novatus, no longer used, where was a large and spacious hall. The Bishop made the dedication in the name of the blessed virgin Praxedes; and in the same place he consecrated a baptistery.'

A Great Persecution.

But after two years a great persecution against the Christians was decreed, and many obtained the crown of martyrdom: Praxedes hid a great number

of Christians in her oratory, nourishing them both with the food of this life and with the Word of God. But, when the Emperor Antoninus heard that these meetings took place in the oratory of Praxedes, he had it searched, and many Christians were taken, especially the priest Simetrius and two-and-twenty others. They were all martyred, and by night the blessed Praxedes collected their bodies, and buried them in the cemetery of Priscilla, 'on the seventh day of the Kalends of June. Then the virgin of the Saviour, worn out with sorrow, only prayed for death. . . . Let us pause a moment over that holy and human grief; she, who as a child had known St. Peter and St. Paul and had seen them go forth to their glorious death, was now an old, old woman, the last of the once large and happy family. Father and mother, sister and brothers were all dead. She had been the spiritual daughter of many Popes, who had all celebrated the Mysteries in her house: they were all dead, all but one martyred; and now the sanctuary of her house was broken up: the refuge she had made there for those she had helped to the faith was no refuge now, but

A Sure Stepping-stone to Death.

'Her tears and her prayers reached to heaven, and fifty-four days after her brethren had suffered she passed to God: and I, Pastor, the priest, have buried her body near that of Pudens, her father.' Where, it may be asked, does that noble body sleep now? Not very far from her sister's, though not in her sister's 'title': but in a title of her own, that of Santa Praxedes, built, according to tradition, in another part of the baths of her brother, St. Novatus. As all these saints, Pudens, Novatus, Pudentiana and Praxedes were buried at first in the cemetery of St. Priscilla, it is of touching interest to remember that Roman tradition makes Priscilla herself the mother of Pudens.

There is yet another tradition that connects Pudens and his title, Pudentiana and her title with our own country: it is that Claudia, the wife of Pudens, the Claudia who sent greeting by St. Paul to 'Timothy, his own son in the faith,' was a native of Britain, the daughter of a British King.

In the Church of St. Pudentiana, our Cardinal's title, there is

A Reminder of the Famous Miracle of Bolsena,

immortalised for ever by the Cathedral of Orvieto and by Raphael's fresco in the Stanza d'Elidoro of the Vatican. Just as at Bolsena a doubting priest found the Host he had consecrated bleeding in his hands, so, at Santa Pudentiana, a priest who doubted whether that which he had consecrated was in truth Christ's Body, dropped It, and It fell, leaving the miraculous imprint of Itself upon the stone less cold than his heart.

Very hurriedly we have tried to recall the august memories that cling about this most venerable Christian sanctuary, linking us with the far-away past, and it is easy to see how exquisite an appropriateness it has for the title of an English Prince of the Church. The first Pius made it a title, the latest Pius has given it to our Cardinal Archbishop, as the last who bore his name and the intolerable burden of the keys gave it, as his title to

The First Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster.

Neither Pius IX., of holiest memory, who constituted anew the Hierarchy of England, nor Pius X., who has completed it, can have forgotten the tradition that makes this holy place the home of a British Princess who knew St. Peter; and the sanctuary whence St. Eleutherius sent St. Fugatius and St. Damianus from his side to convert the Britons. Between Cardinal Wiseman, of the title of St. Pudentiana, and Cardinal Bourne, of the same title, came Cardinal Manning and Cardinal Vaughan, who each had for his title the Church, upon the Cœlian Hill, of St. Gregory the Apostle of the English: our first Cardinal Archbishop and our latest have been given the no less privilege of having their throne in Rome where over seventeen centuries ago was that of St. Eleutherius, Apostle of the Britons.