

CHAPTER II

SPRINGS, WELLS, AND RAIN-WATER CISTERNS IN ANCIENT ROME

Fontinalia a Fonte quod is dies ferial ejus ;
ab eo tum et in fontes coronas jaciunt et puteos
coronant.

VARRO (116-27 B. C.):

De lingua Latina, vi. 22.

Fontinalia, from (the god) Fons, because this
is his festival; hence on that day they throw
wreaths into springs, and garland wells.

FRONTINUS properly calls attention in the beginning of Book I. ("De Aquis," 4) to the sources of water supply in Rome antedating the construction of the first, the Appian aqueduct. "From the foundation of the city, for four hundred and forty-one years, the Romans were content with the use of waters which they drew, either from the Tiber, or from wells, or from springs." And he goes on to name three noted springs, and to call attention to the sacred character borne by springs¹—the dwelling-places of Nymphae—among the Romans.

The presence of an ample water supply undoubtedly influenced the selection of the site of the city, as the place upon which to locate, just as it has and does and always will in multitudes of similar cases in peace and in war. In this respect certainly no better site could have been selected. It consists, in effect, of a bunch of detached hills and spurs formed by reason of the main river and of several smaller lateral streams having cut their channels deep down through the tableland over which they flow. No wonder that springs were plentiful, and to be found at the foot of these hills and in all these valleys. Add to this the fact that Rome, which is now some nineteen miles from the sea, was at the beginning of its history only about eight miles distant, and the abundance of ground water of all sorts underlying the valleys

¹ Dr. jur. Alfred Ossig, *Römisches Wasserrecht*, Leipzig, 1898, makes a strong argument in behalf of the meaning brook (as well as spring) for the Latin word *fons*; so that these may have been either springs, or spring-fed, (in contra-distinction to rain-water, or torrential), rivulets or brooks.

of Rome at the present day becomes a matter of course. "The first human settlement at the mouth of the Tiber, called Ficana, stood on the hill of Dragoncello, opposite Ponte Galera," says Lanciani.¹ When Ancus Martius, the fourth king, founded Ostia, as a substitute for Ficana, the mouth of the river had already advanced seaward about three and one third miles. And Ostia is now some four miles inland. Four miles in six hundred and thirty years is nearly thirty feet per annum, and this is also the present rate of progress. As the sea recedes, it is very evident that the water table in Rome must rise, other things remaining the same;² and no hydraulic engineer can read in Pliny ("Nat. Hist." 36, 24) of Agrippa's having rowed into the Cloaca Maxima, the mouth of which it is now impossible to enter, or read the other facts given in Lanciani's book above quoted (pp. 15, 31) without finding therein proof positive of the ground water having risen in Rome during the historic period many feet, five or six feet, even though the bed of the river is claimed to have risen in eighteen hundred years less than three feet. Cicero says,³ "He [Romulus] chose a place abounding in springs," and the remark characterizes the locality to-day more than ever, especially, of course, in the valleys.

Three of these springs are mentioned by Frontinus: "Camenarum, Apollinis et Juturnae," the first and last-named of which have been definitely located. The great storehouse of archaeological information and bibliography on the subjects treated of in Frontinus' "II. Books on the Water Supply of the City of Rome," is the commentary on this work written by Rodolfo Lanciani, and presented by him to the learned Accademia dei Lincei,⁴ of Rome, in 1880; printed in Series 3, vol. iv. This is a quarto book of over four hundred pages. Though unfortunately buried up in the Italian language to the vast majority of readers, it will well repay any student of "De Aquis" to consult it.

The springs of the Camenae⁵ — of the Prophetic Nymphs — were situated in the valley, also called the Egerian Valley,⁶ just to the south

¹ Lanciani, *The Ruins and Excavations*, etc. p. 1.

² Lanciani, *The Ruins*, etc., p. 31.

³ *De Rep.* ii. 6.

⁴ Founded in 1608, and the oldest learned society now in existence.

⁵ Vitruvius, viii, 3, 1, speaks of this spring as furnishing the best of water.

⁶ Juvenal, *Sat.*, iii. 17; Livy, i. 21; Plut., *Numa*, 13.

of the Caelian, and running at right angles to the present Via Di Porta S. Sebastiano, and parallel to the city wall back of S. Giovanni in Laterano; a valley where in these degenerate days rules the contractor for filling in earth and rubbish by the cubic metre, and the builder of barracks and tenements, rather than the Prophetic Nymphs. In the early days of the Roman Republic this must have been a delightful grove outside the city gates, alongside of a brook naturally still in existence. It was reached by the Appian Way, and lay just outside the famed Porta Capena,¹ fair game for any Roman versifier of the day on account of the leaky condition of the aqueduct, a branch of the Marcia, which was carried over it.² Apparently it required resolution and a stout heart for a poet to pass out by this gate.

Somewhere in this same Egerian valley, it is supposed, was situated the spring called "Fons Apollinis."

"Fons Juturnae"³ is the best located spring of the three that have been named. It was the source of, and but a short distance from, the lake of Curtius, so named after M. Curtius, the Roman youth who leaped into a sink-hole in the Roman Forum, the site of this lake, 362 B.C., in the belief that by so doing he was performing a patriotic duty. The spring of Juturna itself was the site of another still older Roman legend or story, which made it the place where the twins, Castor and Pollux, watered their horses after the battle of Lake Regillus (496 B.C.) in which they had helped the Roman arms, and had then brought to Rome the first news of the Roman victory. No wonder the place became well marked in Roman life and literature. Near it, in the Forum Romanum, stood the temple of Castor and Pollux,⁴ of which the celebrated "three columns" remain to mark the

¹ See Kiepert and Hülsen, *Porta Capena*. Kiepert and Hülsen's *Formae Urbis Romae Antiquae* is much more than three maps. It also contains a table of about all the places in ancient Rome spoken of in literature, together with their locations on these maps, and references to their mention or descriptions in ancient and in modern authors, all done with that completeness which has become the characteristic of German literary work. In the light of such a result of the life-work of earnest scholars, it should be understood that a reference to Kiepert and Hülsen is the equivalent not only of the means of finding the location of the place referred to in Rome, but also descriptions of it in both ancient and modern literature.

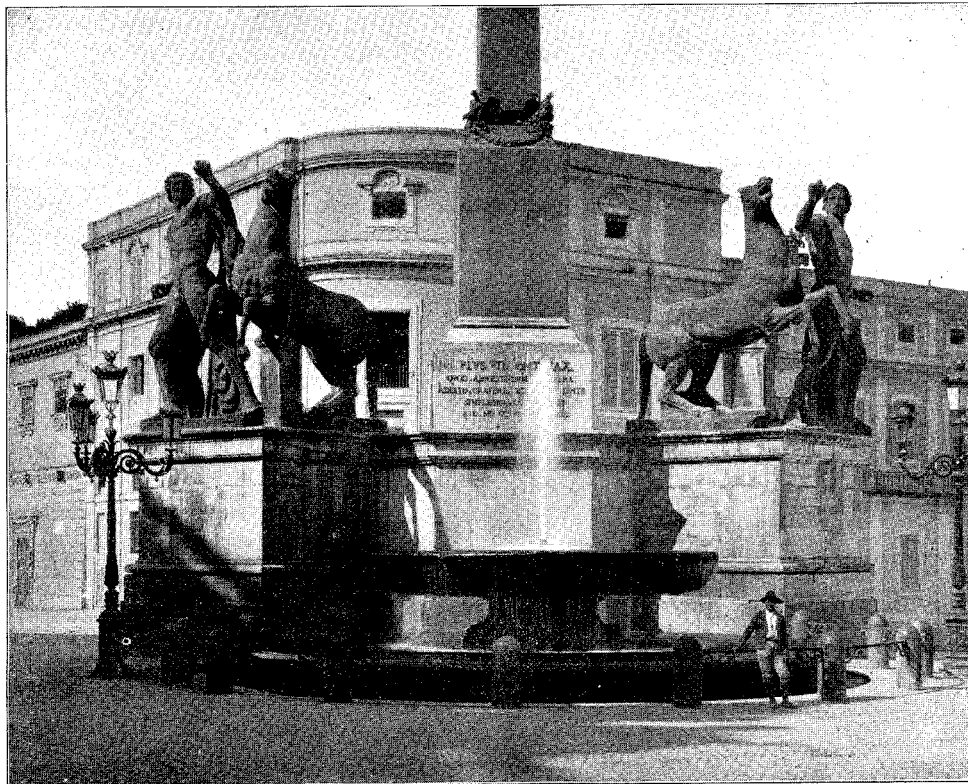
² Martial, iii. 47; "At Porta Capena, which rains great drops." Juvenal, *Sat.* iii. 11: "Moist Capena."

³ Kiepert and Hülsen, *Lacus Juturnae*.

⁴ "The temple in honor of the divine brothers was erected near the spring of Juturna." Ovid, *F.* i. 705.

site, just as they have stood for centuries. "The land between S. M. Liberatrice and S. M. della Grazie has been called *via trium columnarum* (street of the three columns) at least since the end of the fourteenth century."¹

The ground in the vicinity of the remains of the temple of Castor and Pollux is full of springs at this day, and must always be, from the



THE DIOSCURI, OR CASTOR AND POLLUX.²

topography of the country about it. Indeed, when it is considered that the mouth of the Tiber, as has been stated, is constantly receding, and by the large amount of thirty feet annually, it will be evident that only by means of the large main drain, the Cloaca Maxima, passing through to the valley to the Tiber, and by reason of the ground-level rising in the course of ages, can the surface-level of this section

¹ Lanciani, *The Ruins*, etc., p. 273; Nichols, *The Roman Forum*, p. 74.

² As represented by the heroic size statues near the Quirinal Palace in Rome. Antique works of art.

of the city be kept above the level of the ground-water, and thus maintained as dry land. Otherwise, it would return to the condition in which the first inhabitants of Rome found it, before the Cloaca



“THE THREE COLUMNS.”¹

Maxima was built,— a marsh or lake between or back of the two hills, the Palatine and the Capitoline.

In the Galleria Lapidaria of the Vatican, No. 164, may be seen what is believed to have been a votive stone set up near this spring of

¹ Being remains of the Temple of Castor and Pollux. In the background, the buildings on the Capitoline Hill; on the right, the Arch of Severus. Between it and the three columns, the “Column of Phocas;” the “nameless column, with the buried base,” of Lord Byron in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

Juturna.¹ After the exercise of as much diplomacy as would suffice to produce much greater results if applied in another cause, I have been enabled to present a cut of this rare and ancient monument to the readers of this book. The inscriptions on the two sides are nearly



VOIIVE STONE FROM *FONS JUTURNA*.²

identical. From the two combined, a meaning may be deduced somewhat as follows:—

“The two Tiberii Julii, Staphilus and Nymphius, father and son, at their own expense, to Juturna.”

¹ Lanciani, *The Ruins*, etc., pp. 125, 134.

² No. 164, Galleria Lapidaria, Vatican. A very rare form of ancient monument.

A book could be written, as books have been written, on this worship of springs by the Romans. One subordinate branch of archaeology consists of the study of the articles of thank offering and of the tablets of maledictions (*devotiones*) which were deposited in springs and in tombs, respectively, as the favorite place to bring them to the attention of the higher powers, by the actors in these attempts to influence the course of events.

A good example of the first kind may be found in Lanciani's "Ancient Rome," etc., p. 46. This is too good a passage for me to forego the pleasure of quoting entire:—

"There was a well-known custom in ancient times of throwing votive offerings (*sacrae stipes*) into lakes, rivers, and springs which were sacred to the gods, or were famous for their mineral hygienic properties. The custom dates from very remote ages, as the following discovery will testify. In 1852, the Jesuit fathers, owners of the celebrated sulphur springs called by us 'Sorgenti di Vicarello,' by the ancients 'Aquae Apollinares,' on the west border of the Lake of Bracciano, sent from Rome a gang of masons to clear the mouth of the central spring, and to put the whole into neat order. In draining the well, a few feet only below the ordinary level of the waters, they came across a layer of brass and silver coins of the fourth century after Christ. Then they discovered a second layer of gold and silver imperial coins of the first period, together with a certain quantity of votive silver cups. In the third place they came across a stratum of silver family or consular coins belonging to the last centuries of the republic; and under this they found bronze coins,—sextans, quadrans, triens, and so forth. Seeing that there remained nothing but brass to plunder, after having partaken of the precious booty in equal shares, the masons resolved to announce their discoveries. It is unnecessary to say that when Padre Marchi, the well-known numismatist, ran to the spot, he found only a few hundred pieces of *aes grave signatum*, the earliest kind of Roman coinage. Under these there was a bed of *aes rude*,—that is to say, of shapeless fragments of copper, a kind of currency which preceded the use of *aes grave signatum*. At the bottom of the well, under the shapeless fragments of copper, there was nothing but gravel,—at least, the workmen and their leaders thought so. It was not gravel, however;

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