

of the utmost distinction were buried in the Catacombs, and were happy at the prospect of being thus interred, among them Emperors Honorius, Valentinian, Otho II., Popes Leo I. and Leo II., Gregory the Great, Gregories II. and III., and many other illustrious dead.

Most of the Catacombs originated in a single burial-plot owned by some private party. Around this area a gallery was cut in the rock, at a convenient depth below the surface, and reached by staircases at the corners. In the walls of this corridor, recesses were cut as needed. When a vault or chapel was required for a family, martyr, or person of distinction, this was made opening into the gallery. When all the space was filled, other galleries were made on the same level; thus converting the whole area into a net-work of galleries and corridors, which received one subterranean story after another. When adjacent burial-areas came into the same hands, new staircases were cut and new communications. Times of persecution caused other alterations. Staircases were sometimes abruptly cut off, leaving gaps that required ladders; then other and secret passages were formed, connecting with the sand-pits, and through them with the country. Thus, catacombs originally distinct became connected, and with endless complications.

In 1837, a school of some thirty youth, with their teacher, descended into these mazes for a visit. They never reappeared; and they never could be found. It is said that the experienced guides, torch in hand, do not like to wander far from the beaten paths lest they lose their way and perish. The idea that these crypts were dug without the knowledge or permission of the municipal authorities is erroneous. Such secrecy in their construction was neither necessary nor possible; and their vast extent bears witness to the great development of the Christian body. Only a powerful community, uninterrupted by the police, could have excavated labyrinths of such enormous extent. They are found in every direction (within a circuit of three miles) outside the city walls. The Catacomb of St. Alexander is six miles distant. Their number is said to be near sixty. The highest stories are 22 or 25 feet below the surface of the ground; and the lower, from 60 to 75 below. It has been calculated that the entire length of the galleries is not less than 800 or 900 miles; and that they have received from 6,000,000 to 7,000,000 interments; that for every person who threads the streets of Rome, 20 have been borne to rest in those gloomy caverns. But even partial exploration is dangerous, as the walls in some cases are threatening to cave in; thorough exploration is impossible.

The pagans, in their burying-grounds, generally made distinctions between the rich and the poor and the different classes of society. But, though we have evidence that the graves in the Catacombs were occupied by different classes in the Christian Church, the clergy, readers (lectores), "widows" or ministering women, catechumens, etc., all were buried side by side. In Christ Jesus all were one.