



Fig. 1.—Entrance to the Catacomb of St. Priscilla.

This description of the Catacombs in the fourth century is equally applicable to their general appearance in the nineteenth. Their main features are unchanged, although time and decay have greatly impaired their structure and defaced their beauty. These Christian cemeteries are situated chiefly near the great roads leading from the city, and, for the most part, within a circle of three miles from the walls. From this circumstance they have been compared to the "encampment of a Christian host besieging Pagan Rome, and driving inward its mines and trenches with an assurance of

Græc.) it is derived from *κατὰ* and *κύβη*, a boat or canoe, from the resemblance of a sarcophagus to that object. The more probable derivation seems to the present writer to be from *κατὰ* and *κύβος*, a hollow, as if descriptive of a subterranean excavation. The name was first given in the sixth century to a limited area beneath the Church of St. Sebastian: "*Locus qui dicitur catacumbas.*"—S. Greg.; *Opp.*, tom. ii, ep. 30. It was afterward generically applied to all subterranean places of sepulture. The earliest writers who mention those of Rome call them *cryptæ*, or crypts, or *cæmeteria*—whence our word cemetery, literally, sleeping places, from *κοιμάω*, to slumber. Similar excavations have been found in Syria, Asia Minor, Cyprus, Crete, the Ægean Isles, Greece, Sicily, Naples, Malta, and France.

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