

oppressor, such as the higher orders of the clergy, and the well-known leaders of the body, would be the first to avail themselves of this security, leaving the more obscure brethren to continue their ordinary avocations and to be the means of support to those who were forced to live in the tombs beneath them. But as the persecution grew in intensity, greater numbers would follow the example of their leaders, and take up their abodes and live and die and be buried in the Catacombs. As they thus became more the permanent habitations of the living as well as the receptacles of the dead, they were improved,—if such a term can be used,—or adapted to suit the wants of their inhabitants. Every here and there larger spaces were excavated for chapels, and here in these gloomy recesses, far from the rage of man, the pastors would assemble their flocks, open the blessed volume, and hold sweet communion with their Father in heaven.

But even here they were not always free from the footsteps of the pursuer. In the time of the celebrated Cyprian of Carthage, it is recorded that Xystus, Bishop of Rome, together with Quartus, one of his clergy, suffered martyrdom in the Catacombs, and Stephen, another Bishop of Rome, was traced by the heathen soldiers to his subterranean chapel. They allowed him to conclude the service in which he was engaged, when he was thrust back into his chair and thus beheaded.

The incidents connected with such a sojourn would surpass in interest the fictions of romance, but few are recorded;—the great aim of the believers was not to seek for earthly fame, but to live the life and to die the death of the Christian; they wished not to be known of men, but steadfastly to run their race, “looking unto Jesus,” who would reward them with the crown of glory and the heavenly inheritance. Yet some few are mentioned by ecclesiastical writers, and are considered worthy of credence. It is said that Stephen, the first Roman Bishop of that name, was compelled to pass much of his time under ground, and that he used to send forth the priest Eusebius, and the deacon Marcellus, to invite the faithful to come to him for personal conference. There he assembled his clergy and collected the neophytes, instructed and baptized them. On one occasion,