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THE CATACOMBS OF ROME.

BOOK FIRST.

STRUCTURE AND HISTORY OF THE CATACOMBS.

CHAPTER I.

STRUCTURE OF THE CATACOMBS.

"AMONG the cultivated grounds not far from the city of Rome," says the Christian poet Prudentius, "lies a deep crypt, with dark recesses. A descending path, with winding steps, leads through the dim turnings, and the daylight, entering by the mouth of the cavern, somewhat illumines the first part of the way. But the darkness grows deeper as we advance, till we meet with openings, cut in the roof of the passages, admitting light from above. On all sides spreads the densely-woven labyrinth of paths, branching into caverned chapels and sepulchral halls; and throughout the subterranean maze, through frequent openings, penetrates the light."*

* *Haud procul extremo culta ad pomœria vallo,
Mersa latebrosis crypta patet foveis. . . —Peristephanon, iv.*

The origin of the word Catacombs is exceedingly obscure. Father Marchi derives it from *κατὰ*, down, and *τύμβος*, a tomb; or from *κατὰ* and *κοιμῶ*, to sleep. Mommsen thinks it comes from *κατὰ* and *cumbo*, part of *decumbo*, to lie down. According to Schneider (*Lex.*