

became ambitious to sleep at last beside those who had been so holy in life, or so glorious in death. New graves were excavated in the already crowded galleries and chambers, cutting through beautiful frescoes and mutilating or wholly destroying costly paintings.

Then came successive deluges of barbarian hordes sweeping down upon the Roman capital during the fourth and fifth centuries. The rude soldiery recked little for mere works of art, "and many a porphyry vase, or priceless statue was shattered by the barbarian battle-axe." Even the dun crypts of the catacombs were entered and stripped of their costly adornings, and their graves rifled in search of hidden treasure.

A new element of destruction now came into play. This was the wholesale translation of the bodies of the saints from the catacombs to the churches of the city in order to save them from the sacrilegious hands of the barbarians. The practice grew. It soon became essential to the consecration of a church that it should have martyrs' relics. Hence arose a demand; hence a trade of supply. The catacombs, the great store-house of the martyrs' relics, were rifled, and their contents carried to the four quarters of the land.

Robbed of their martyrs' relics, there was little use for the protection and adornment of the catacombs, and so, like some worked-out mine, they were gradually abandoned. A blight fell on the plain beneath which they had been digged, bringing desolation and pestilence in its train. Its former inhabitants took refuge within the city's walls, and during the darkness of the middle ages the catacombs were almost forgotten. The rains of one thousand autumns, and the frosts of one thousand winters crumbled the galleries, and caused the roofs to fall, and made them a fit house for the

owl and bat. During the fifteenth century they were unknown, or known only to the robber and conspirator.

Toward the end of the sixteenth century a profound sensation spread throughout the old city. It was reported that some labourers digging on the Salarian way had come suddenly on an ancient cemetery. Rome was astonished to find beneath her suburbs this long-concealed burial ground of her former saints.

Exploration was at once commenced. Bosio, of Malta, was the Christopher Columbus of the Catacombs. Numerous travellers and explorers followed his steps, and gave the results of their researches to the world. But the true founder of the history of subterranean Rome was De Rossi, who has thrown upon them all the light that prodigious erudition and faithful effort could then give.

Next followed M. Roller, who combined with erudition, "strong reason, historical feeling, and love of truth." His work, filled with beautiful photographs taken in the crypts by magnesium light, is one of exceptional value. Among recent writers the name of Rev. Dr. Withrow, Toronto, should be mentioned. His work, on which has been expended a vast amount of labour, is one of considerable merit, and brings into popular form a large fund of information till recently inaccessible to the general reader.

"The greatest interest of the catacombs is not the light they throw upon the funeral customs of a persecuted sect, nor the bond they permit us to establish between the art of the beginning of our era and that of the middle ages. The catacombs are, above all things, of inappreciable value for the information they give us concerning early Christian beliefs."

The belief in the resurrection and the future life are characteristics that sharply distinguish the Christian