

Constantine and lasted ten centuries ; the present stately edifice was begun by Clement V., and completed by Clement XII. Over the grand front is a balustrade supporting ten colossal statues of saints, with one of our Saviour in the middle. In the piazza stands a magnificent obelisk of the epoch of the Pharaohs, taken from the Temple of the Sun, at Thebes, to Alexandria, by Constantine, and brought from thence to Rome by his son Constantius. It is of the red Syene granite, covered with hieroglyphics in six verticle columns. Of the twelve Egyptian obelisks which adorn the city, this is the finest and largest.

The interior of the church is enriched with superb pillars, and other marbles taken from various ancient Roman temples ; one of its chapels, the Corsini, is extremely magnificent, being particularly rich in sculpture, and containing the most beautiful sarcophagus known to exist ; it was taken from the Pantheon, and was once the tomb of Agrippa, but now contains the ashes of Clement XII.

By St. John Lateran is the *Scala Santa*, in which is a marble staircase of twenty-eight steps, brought by Constantine from the palace of Pilate at Jerusalem. These steps, sanctified by our Saviour's having ascended and descended them, the faithful only mount on their knees, and so worn have they become by the multitude who continually seek thus to ascend them, that it has been found necessary to cover them with wood. Near the *Scala Santa* is the basilica of *Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*, famous for containing a considerable portion of the holy cross which was brought from Jerusalem by the Empress Helene, the mother of Constantine. It is well known, that

a vast majority of the relics of Catholic churches are not what they are by many supposed to be,* but no doubt whatever can exist in regard to the genuineness of this, except that pertaining to all things of the truth of which we have to rely upon human testimony ; the most jealous scrutiny and research in regard to its history, have only tended to establish its authenticity. It would have been strange, indeed, if the disciples and immediate followers of our Saviour, had failed to preserve so interesting a relic as the cross on which he was crucified ; nor is it wonderful that portions of it should have been preserved in the capital of the Christian world to the present time. Many persons who, on ordinary testimony, yield a ready assent to the authenticity of medals, sculptures, and other antiquities of a much earlier period than that of the crucifixion, manifest a settled determination to reject every the strongest proof of the genuineness of the sacred relics of the church. The sentimental piety which regards these treasured memorials with reverence, doubtless leads in most cases to genuine devotion. No Catholic considers his devotion to any special relic as a necessary part of religion. The lamented Bishop England says, "our principle regarding sacred relics, is, that in religion they are to be held in veneration, corresponding to that in which tokens of affection and memorials of endearment are preserved in well-regulated and virtuous families. How often is some delicious feeling indulged apart from the intrusion of the stranger, regarding that which to him would appear a trifle ? A ring, a book, even a lock of hair, from that head which in

* This is a mere assertion of the writer, which we take leave to deny.—Ep.