

at disposal was reached, a second story, to which a flight of steps led down, was hollowed out; then a third. There is one example of five tiers of galleries, one above another. Thus a large amount of space was obtained on the sides of the passage ways for burial. Lateral niches were cut out in the wall, to the measure of the body, as close together as the loose nature of the tufa would permit. When the corpse had been placed in, the niche was closed by tiles cemented together; sometimes by a marble tablet.

All the dead were not shut into a simple grave, such as we have just described. The opening of a tomb was sometimes surrounded by an arched vault, the sides of which formed places for other bodies. These were family tombs. They even sometimes took the shape of a separate vault, shut in by a door.

The age of persecution following the decree of Valerian, caused a noticeable change in the construction of the catacombs. They became more designed for safety and concealment. The galleries are less lofty; the graves are more crowded because of the greater difficulty of removing excavated material; the main entrances are blocked up; the stair-ways are demolished. Sometimes entire galleries were filled with earth or blocked up with masonry to obstruct pursuit. Means of escape are provided by secret stairways and ladders.

It is impossible that many Christians could ever have taken refuge here for a lengthened period. The vast number and extent of the galleries and chambers would afford room for a multitude, but the difficulty of procuring food, and the confined atmosphere poisoned by exhaling gases would render prolonged stay impossible.

The *inscriptions* and *symbolism* of the catacombs are interesting. "The art of any people," says Withrow,

is the outgrowth of an eternal living principle. And as is the tree so is its fruit. An adequate representation of its art being given, we may approximately estimate the moral condition of an age or community. The exhumation of Pompeii and the recent exploration of the catacombs bring into sharp contrast Christian and pagan art. While traversing the deserted chambers of the former two thousand years roll back, and we stand among the objects familiar to the gaze of the maids and matrons of the palmy days of Rome. But what a tale of prevailing sensuality do we read in the polluting pictures on every side. Nothing can give a more vivid conception of the appalling degradation of pagan society in the first century of the Christian era than the disinterred art of that Roman Sodom. But in the catacombs we are transported to an entirely different world. Here we breathe a pure moral atmosphere. We see the evidences of a pure and beautiful social and domestic life. We see the infinite grandeur of these persecuted Christians."

"A universal instinct leads us to beautify the sepulchres of the dead. In expressing their faith and hope, or tracing the emblem of victory on the graves of the catacombs the early Christians had not to create the principles of art, but to adapt to the expression of Christian thought an art already fully developed. Hence we find such myths as the stories of Orpheus and Eurydice, or of Ulysses and the sirens made to do duty only under ennobled Christian conceptions." The earlier paintings of the catacombs are superior in execution, and manifest a richness, a vigor, and freedom like that of the best specimens of the classic period. As the empire died, art also declined gradually till it sank into the barbarism of the Byzantine period.

"The symbolism of the catacombs,