

A VISIT TO THE CATACOMBS; OR, GLIMPSES OF THE EARLY CHURCH.

BY THE HON. S. L. SHANNON.

FIRST PAPER.

THE traveller to the Eternal City, whose mind has been imbued with classical recollections, finds, when he reaches it, a rich treat spread before him. As day after day he pursues his rounds, visiting at one time the remains of temple, amphitheatre, or triumphal arch; at another surveying the sweeping lines of the aqueducts as they span the Campagna, or penetrating the recesses of mausoleum or bath, he feels in the language of the poet:—

“Where’er he treads ’tis haunted, holy ground.”

The present seems almost to sink before him, and the past with its illustrious dead to come to life, until in his imagination the city upon which he gazes appears no longer the capital of the Popes, but the metropolis of the Cæsars, and the mistress of the world. And if to his recollections of history there be added a taste for art, how does he love to linger in the museums, and to gaze upon those matchless forms which the skill of Phidias or Praxiteles, or their disciples, have bequeathed to us.

But the Christian traveller, while he is far from being insensible to all this, yet feels that for him Rome has even superior attractions. He recollects that her streets were once traversed by the footsteps of the Apostle of the Gentiles, that her colossal amphitheatre witnessed the martyrdom of the early Christians, and that in every direction there are traces of that great conflict which went on for nearly three centuries between light and darkness, between Pagan superstition and Gospel purity, until in the end the Cross triumphed, and that which had been hitherto the stigmatized instrument of the malefactor’s death, became the standard under which a Christian emperor led his cohorts on to victory. The museum which he most loves to frequent is that which contains the memorials of the early Christians; and though the mere artist may turn with