

this substance is less compact than the tufa, and has just consistency enough to retain the form given to it by excavation. It is called by the Italians "tufa granolará."

The Christian architects drove all their lines of excavation through this granular stratum, which, in its lowest formation, degenerates into volcanic ashes known as "pozzolana," and is used extensively in the manufacture of Roman cement. An Italian explorer of these tombs computes the entire length of all the galleries, if extended in one line, to be 900 miles; and that they contain about seven millions of graves! No one now can imagine when they were begun, or by whom, or what was done with the materials dug out.

There is no early history of these Catacombs. There is no doubt that they were excavated for tombs; these line the walls throughout as close to one another as the berths in the side of a ship, or ly separated by an intervening shelf of the native rock. The tombs were fitted in size to the bodies that were to occupy them. Every one was closed, when filled, with tiles, or a marble slab. The custom of burying in tombs hewn out of the rock was probably of Jewish origin. Our Saviour was laid in such a tomb. They abounded in the soft rocks that surrounded Jerusalem.

In the Roman Catacombs, an inscription indicated the name of the person, with the date of interment, and some appropriate motto. The heathen inscriptions indicated that the dead was "placed" or "composed" in his cell, with his titles and offices added. The Christian "sleeps," or "sleeps in peace," or "rests from his labors," with no designations of civil station or rank. Ecclesiastical titles, and the fact of martyrdom, when it occurred, were added. The earliest recorded inscription is of the year 102. The following is a translation of one that was made A. D. 160:—

"In Christ—Alexander is not dead, but lives above the stars, and his body rests in this tomb. He ended his life under the Emperor Antonius,

who, foreseeing that great benefit would result from his services, returned evil for good. For, while on his knees, and about to sacrifice to the true God, he was led away to execution. Oh sad times, in which, among sacred rites and prayers, even in caverns we are not safe. What can be more wretched than such a life? when they cannot be buried by their friends and relations—at length they shine in heaven. He has scarcely lived who has lived in Christian times." What a commentary is this upon the wickedness of those times of imperial persecution!

A little work published by the American Sunday School Union entitled "Catacombs of Rome," says: "The Catacombs (Greek, hollow) were first excavated to procure pozzolana for building materials. The modern entrance is from the church of St. Sebastian, two miles from the city, on the Appian way. The excavations, it is said, extend one to Ostia, 20 miles, and in another to Albano, 12 miles.—There is a gallery in the buildings of the Vatican, 1,000 feet long, called the "Lapidaria Gallery," containing more than 3,000 slabs with inscriptions taken from the Catacombs. One side of the gallery is given to heathen monuments the other to Christian."

From this narrative, we should infer that both heathens and Christians used the Catacombs as places of interment. This is not the common opinion. They are usually represented as belonging to Christians only. Perhaps the heathen monuments are from other sources. There can be no doubt that they were used by them as places of refuge in times of persecution.

There were also in these subterranean labyrinths, crypts or larger vaults, evidently excavated for Divine worship. To these, Christians retired when forbidden to practise their devotions in open day. These churches were also filled with tombs, both in the floors and in side walls. Many of the tombs, throughout the entire range of excavations, contained precious memorials laid away with the dead by the hands of affection. Thousands of