

## NOTES ON THE DATES OF THE PAINTINGS IN THE ROMAN CATACOMBS.

By J. H. PARKER, C.B.

Dr. Spencer Northcote has been publishing in the Roman Catholic Magazine called *The Month* an attack on the volume of my great work on the "Archæology of Rome," which relates to the catacombs. The Pagan tombs on the sides of the great roads assist very much in the proper understanding of these subterranean tombs connected with the subterranean sandpits and sandpit roads, and my two volumes on the "Tombs" and the "Catacombs" are closely connected together. My object was an archæological one only, and by the history of art, to ascertain the dates of the *paintings* in the catacombs. Dr. Northcote appeals to the *inscriptions* as proofs that they were used as burial places in the second and third centuries, which I have never doubted. I have always said that the inscriptions are of the time of the interments, but *the paintings are not*. Dr. Northcote follows the example of the Roman Catholic writers in general, in *assuming*, as a thing that nobody thinks of doubting, the really important and doubtful question—the *age of the wall paintings* in the catacombs. In his popular abridgment of the great work of De Rossi on this subject the title of *Roma Subterranea* is calculated to mislead and does practically mislead many persons. Nearly all the visitors to Rome expect to find the catacombs under Rome itself instead of two or three miles off. The three thick quarto volumes of De Rossi all relate to *one* catacomb, that of St. Calixtus, in which the bishops of Rome were buried, and which was therefore more likely to have been *exclusively* Christian than any of the forty (?) catacombs, and yet even in this there is a Pagan tomb at the entrance and a flight of steps from it down into the catacomb, which seems to have been an original entrance; and in that of Prætextatus, where also an entrance is through a Pagan tomb. There is no improbability in the same family having made a tomb and a catacomb connected with it before they became Christians.

The history of art has not always been connected with religious disputes, and the history of painting has never been my study, but the question of the dates of these paintings has interested me from the first season that I was in Rome, when I used to go every Monday morning into one of the catacombs with my friend Mr. Long, who took the opposite view, as he always had faith in the Roman Catholic view on the subject. I kept my book back until I found that my views as to the dates of the paintings were confirmed by so very competent a judge as Mr. Gambier Parry, and then I cancelled all the leaves in which I had accused De Rossi of making the restorations, on information given to me originally by a Roman Catholic priest, who was a good antiquary on ecclesiastical subjects. When De Rossi distinctly contradicted what he had told me, I cancelled the leaves, but

I believe one has escaped me, which I regret. I do not wish to say a word against De Rossi, from whom I have received much kindness.

Dr. Northcote finds great fault with the dates that I have given for these subterranean cemeteries, but he omits to say that these dates are those of Anastasius; they are no conjectures of mine. All I have done is to add the *anno domini* to the names of the popes whom Anastasius says *made* them or restored them. I never voluntarily touch on theological questions, but I have been an archæologist from my youth, and as such necessarily a searcher after *truth* on all points.

Dr. Northcote asserts and assumes that the greater part of these paintings belong to the first three centuries of the Christian era, in the time of persecution. De Rossi himself is careful never to say so, because he knows perfectly well that *three fourths of them* are of the eighth or ninth century, about the time that Charlemagne was in Rome, when so many of these tombs were restored by the popes. The dates which De Rossi has given, and Dr. Northcote quotes and misapplies, apply to the inscriptions, not to the wall paintings, which *he* is quite aware have largely been *restored*. Those at Naples have also been restored at the same time, and in that instance the upper coat of *gesso* (or fine plaster) has fallen off in several places, and shews the earlier paintings under it. I am almost certain that I once saw the same thing in one of the many *cubicula* in the great cemetery called after Nereus and Achilleus and other martyrs, but this was before I had obtained leave to have photographs taken, and I had not taken sufficient notice of the particular *cubiculum* to be able to find it again. In another of these *cubicula* a different process of *restoration* has been employed, the original paintings are in outline only, and some of these are left, others have been *restored* by filling up the outlines with colour. Anastasius, the Librarian of the Vatican, who was authorised by the Pontifical Government to publish the Bishop's Registers, as the best history of the Roman Church, always calls these subterranean tombs *cemeteries*, and records the *restoration*<sup>1</sup> of thirty-

<sup>1</sup> The cemeteries (or catacombs) recorded to have been *restored* in the eighth century by the popes are —

731—741. Gregory III. (*a*)

S. Urbanus. (*See* Plate xxvii.)

„ Maximus.

„ Petronilla. (Plate xxii.)

772—795. Hadrian I. (*b*)

SS. Peter and Marcellinus. (Pl. xvii and *Hist. Photos.* 2115 to 2119.)

S. Tertullian.

„ Felix.

„ Agapetus.

„ Januarius.

„ Cyrinus.

„ Cyriaca. (*Hist. Photos.* 468, 472, 479, 482.)

„ Hermes.

„ Prothus.

„ Hyacinthus.

„ Felicitas.

„ Daria.

„ Hilarius.

The Jordanes.

(*a*) Anastasius 202. (*b*) *Ibid* 325.

772—795. Hadrian I.

S. Alexander.

„ Vitalis.

„ Martialis.

„ Silvester.

„ Abdon and Sennen.

„ Candida.

„ Hippolytus.

„ Laurentius. (*e*)

795. Leo III. (*d*)

S. Sixtus.

„ Cornelius.

„ Zoticus.

857. Benedictus III. (*e*)

S. Marcus.

858—857. Nicolas I. (*f*)

S. Priscilla. (Plates iii and v, and *Hist. Photos.* 612, 1460, 1467, 1469, 1470, 1471, 1472.)

„ Basilla,

„ Saturninus.

„ Felix.

„ Pontianus.

„ Sebastianus.

(*c*) 350. (*d*) 361. (*e*) 572. (*f*) 601.

three of them by the Popes between 731 and 860, and, as might naturally be expected, the paintings usually belong to the *latest* restoration. No one who has paid any attention to the history of art can believe that the *drawing* of the beautiful wall pictures and stucco ornament in the painted tombs on the Via Latina, which are dated by brick stamps in the walls as being of the second and third centuries, are of the same periods as those in the catacombs. It is only necessary to compare the photo-engravings in Plates xv and xvi of my volume on the Tombs, or, still better, the Historical Photographs themselves, Nos. 2091 to 2103, from which they were taken,<sup>1</sup> with any of the paintings in the catacombs that are of religious subjects, to see that they belong to a very different period. Three-fourths of them, as I have said, are of the eighth or ninth century, especially those in the catacomb of St. Pontianus,<sup>2</sup> which are the most perfect and therefore the most popular. Of the remainder of these paintings many are of the time of Pope John I, A.D. 523-536, "who made (*fecit*) the cemetery of the blessed martyrs Nereus and Achilleus on the Via Ardeatina, and renewed (or restored) the cemetery of St. Felix and Adauctus and Domitilla on the Via Ostiensis, and Priscilla on the Via Salaria."<sup>3</sup> The same subjects, in the same style of painting, are found in all these three cemeteries or catacombs.<sup>4</sup>

If *all* the very numerous Pagan inscriptions found in the catacombs were taken there as old marble, only to be used again, why did the learned Padri Marchi, the predecessor of De Rossi in the post of *custode* of the catacombs, think it necessary in his excellent work on the subject to mark carefully on his plans the exact site where each Pagan inscription was found?<sup>5</sup> Nor does De Rossi ever go so far as Dr. Northcote in his assertions on this subject. The last time I was in the catacomb of St. Agnes there was a large slab of marble at the least a yard square and quite an inch thick, of which the back is

<sup>1</sup> These photographs can be seen in the Bodleian Library and the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and most of them at the South Kensington Museum, and in the British Museum, or they may be obtained by order from Mr. Stanford, at Charing Cross, for one shilling each, and are sold separately. This will enable any one to satisfy himself on a doubtful point, by ordering the number mentioned.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Historical Photographs* of them, Nos. 463, 607 A and B, 608 A and B, 609 A and B, 610 A and B. Those marked A are taken from the original with the magnesian light, and those marked B are from modern drawings of them. By comparing these enquirers may see the difference between the pretty pictures of modern artists, such as those in Dr. Northcote's book and the originals, and can also judge of the date of the originals if they know anything of the history of art.

<sup>3</sup> Anastatius, lv, 89.

<sup>4</sup> See the sixteen photo-engravings of these paintings from the Catacombs in

my volume on that subject, or again, still better, the photographs themselves from which the engravings were made. The photographs were taken for me by the late Charles Smeaton, a very clever Canadian photographer, whom I had taken from London for that purpose—with the help of the light of magnesium. All the Roman photographers had told Cardinal Antonelli that it was *impossible* to take photographs in the catacombs, and gave apparently very strong reason for saying so. No one has been allowed to take any more since these were taken.

<sup>5</sup> The following inscription is given by Padre Marchi in his work entitled *Monumenti delle arti Christiane Primitive delle Metropoli del Christianismo*, Roma, 1841, 4to., plate xxx:—

COMPARATI SATVRNINVS AGVSTO LOCVM  
VISOMVM AVRI SOLIDVS DVO, IN LVMINARE  
MAIORE QVI POSITA EST IBI QVI FVIT CVM  
MARITO.

This shows the custom of purchasing a *loculus* in a catacomb the same as in a tomb, by the side of the road.

rough, with the mortar still adhering to it by which it has been affixed to the wall, on the face of the slab was a Pagan inscription. In this catacomb there are entrances from below, also into three Pagan tombs, the upper parts of which are either destroyed or buried in the garden of the monks; this is made on the site of a great public cemetery, with the *cubiculum*, or burial vaults, of St. Agnes at one end and that of St. Constantia at the other, over one of which the church of St. Agnes has been built, and over the other the mausoleum of St. Constantia. Several of these burial chapels may still be seen at the original entrances to the catacombs, especially in that of Prætextatus, which is the earliest of them. Professor Settele, who was *custode* before Padre Marchi, has recorded also the finding of Pagan inscriptions in his time; this is cited by De Rossi and repeated by Dr. Northcote, but he does not appear to see the natural inference.

It is remarkable that the original entrances are very rarely now used, and new entrances have been made at the expense of the Roman Curia, and most of them within the last twenty years. One of the original entrances to that of Prætextatus is through a Pagan tomb near the Via Appia, but this has never been allowed to be used since an entrance was made on the road to St. Urban's, the reason assigned being that there was a dispute between the pontifical authorities and the owner of the vineyard. I obtained an introduction to that gentleman, and he assured me that he was not even allowed to have a key of it; he had not the least objection to this catacomb being visited. The steps that lead down to it are so covered with nettles and thistles that it is very difficult to descend, so that practically the only entrance is by a long ladder from the top to the floor of the third storey of the catacomb; such a ladder the proprietor told me the gardener had, but that the pontifical authorities had some one always on the watch to see that it was not used, and threatened him with all sorts of punishment if he allowed it to be used. The persons whom I employed, knowing all this, persuaded "the man on the watch" to go to breakfast with them, and as the *osteria* was two miles off the opportunity was taken by the gardener to place the ladder, by which I descended, and also sent an artist down, who made me the drawings of the interior and of the Pagan figures engraved in plates xii, xiii, xiv.<sup>1</sup>

If the catacombs were *exclusively* Christian, as Dr. Northcote asserts, how does it happen that *three* of them are distinctly the burial places of the Jews, with Jewish emblems in all parts? and another has all the paintings in it belonging to the worshippers of Mithras?<sup>2</sup> Can any one look at the pictures of gilt glass vases in Plate VIII of that subject in my book, and say that they are Christian, when they represent an idol of Hercules and the Three Graces?

I have said that the name for these subterranean tombs always used by Anastatius is *cemetaria*; catacomb is a mediæval or modern name for them, and originated in a mistake; *Catacumba* was the name of a locality—the valley under the hill on which stands the well-known

<sup>1</sup> There are three family burial chapels at the top of these steps; they are all of the time of Constantine, evidently built immediately after the "Peace of the Church" was proclaimed (see pl. x, xi, xv).

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Photographs*, Nos. 562, 773, 774, 775.

<sup>3</sup> See Plates xv and xvi, and *Historical Photographs*, Nos. 1781, 1791, 1792.

tomb of Cecilia Metella, and which valley has the church of St. Urban at one end, and that of St. Sebastian at the other.<sup>1</sup> The great catacomb of Prætextatus is between the two, and probably extended from one to the other, or perhaps did not cross the Via Appia, but only *extended to it*. Each of these churches was at the entrance to an extensive range of subterranean cemeteries called catacombs, probably called so from the locality. The Circus of Maxentius<sup>2</sup> was also made *in Catacumbis*, and this is close to the church of St. Urban and to the catacomb of Prætextatus, the earliest of the catacombs. Pope Paul I. (A.D. 757-768) complained bitterly of the damage done by the impious Lombards, and began the removal of the relics into Rome for security.<sup>3</sup> Anastasius describes "the church of St. Sebastian, where the bodies of the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul are said to have been deposited for a time, as being at the third mile on the Via Appia outside of the Porta Appia, in the place (or valley) which is called *THE CATACOMBS*, where the body of St. Sebastian rests with the others."<sup>4 5</sup>

The attempt of Dr. Northcote and his Roman friends to deny that there was any connection between these cemeteries (or catacombs) and the sandpits or sandpit roads is really absurd to any one who knows them. There is hardly one but what has a sandpit in it or close to it, and one entrance was always from a sandpit road. The one at St. Agnes has been shewn to the archaeologists by scores for some years past, because that cemetery being under the garden of the monks was in some degree independent of the usual authorities, and people could go and see it at any time without *asking for permission* from the Cardinal Vicar, a ceremony that English people do not like. The good monk who shewed it used to amuse the people by popping out into the sandpit at different levels. In that of St. Generosa, excavated by the Germans, the sandpit was very distinctly left visible. I do not attach the slightest importance to this one way or the other, and cannot understand why the Roman Catholics object to acknowledge it, unless it is that formerly the catacombs were supposed by some to have been sandpits.

The earliest mention that we have of these cemeteries is that Anicetus, A.D. 167, the Syrian bishop and pope and martyr, was buried in the cemetery of Calixtus.<sup>6</sup> According to the Roman Catholic authority Anastasius, St. Peter, the first pope (?), was buried in the temple of Apollo, near which he was crucified, and near the palace of Nero on the Vatican<sup>7</sup> (?). Anacletus, A.D. 103, a Greek from Athens in

<sup>1</sup> See the plan of this valley in Plate ix, on a small scale, shewing also the Circus Maxentius. It is intended merely to mark the site, which included also part of the catacomb of Prætextatus.

<sup>2</sup> Maxentius . . . Fecit Thermas in Palatio . . . *circum in Catacumbas*—fames magna fuit.—*Ancient Catalogue of the Emperors*, published by Eccard.

<sup>3</sup> Anastasius, xcv, 260.

<sup>4</sup> "Verum etiam et ecclesiam apostolorum foris portam Appiam milliario tertio, *in loco qui appellatur Catacumbas*, ubi corpus beati Sebastiani martyris cum aliis quiescit in ruinis preventam a novo *restauravit*."—Anastasius, 343.

<sup>5</sup> See Plates xx and xxi.

<sup>6</sup> Anastasius xi.

<sup>7</sup> This catacomb is stated by the modern Roman Catholics to have been entirely destroyed when the present great building was erected. We have no archaeological evidence that there ever was a catacomb on that site; no inscriptions from it are preserved. The crypt of the present church is the floor of the old church, with a number of tombs upon it of emperors, kings, and popes, going back as far as the fourth century, but not earlier.

*Ibid.* i. See also *Les Eglises de Rome*, par Mgr. X. Barbier de Montault: Arras,

the time of Domitian in the same place.<sup>1</sup> St. Evaristus, also a Greek<sup>2</sup> (?), but of the name of *Juda*, from Bethlehem in Judæa, in the same place. St. Alexander, a Roman, in the time of Trajan was beheaded at the seventh mile on the Via Nomentana, and buried there,<sup>3</sup> and a catacomb was made there, long forgotten and discovered by accident in 1855. SS. Sixtus, also a Roman; Telesphorus, a Greek anchorite; Hyginus, a Greek philosopher from Athens; Pius, an Italian from Aquileia, in the time of Antoninus Pius; Eleutherius, a Greek; Victor, an African, were all buried near St. Peter in the Vatican palace (?). Zepherinus, a Roman in the time of Marcus Antoninus and Septimius Severus, was buried in the cemetery of his own family, near that of Calixtus. St. Calixtus, a Roman in the time of Macrinus and Heliogabalus, made the cemetery that bears his name, in which several of the bishops and popes—St. Anterus, a Greek, St. Pontianus, a Roman, St. Fabianus, a Roman, St. Cornelius, a Roman, St. Lucius, of Lucca, St. Stephanus, a Roman, St. Dionysius,<sup>4</sup> St. Eutychianus, an Etruscan of the city of Luna, St. Caius, a Dalmatian of the family of the emperor Diocletian, St. Eusebius, a Greek, under Constantine, were buried in the cemetery of Calixtus, and St. Calixtus himself was buried in the cemetery of Calepodius at the third mile on the Via Aurelia.<sup>5</sup> St. Urban, a Roman in the time of Maximinus, and St. Sixtus, a Greek philosopher, were buried in the cemetery of Prætextatus on the Via Appia. St. Felix, a Roman, was buried in a church which he had built at the second mile on the Via Aurelia.

St. Marcellinus, a Roman, was beheaded in the great persecution under Diocletian, and his remains, with those of other martyrs, were collected by St. Marcellus, and buried in the cemetery of Priscilla. St. Marcellus himself was afterwards pope and a martyr under Maxentius, his remains were collected by the blessed Lucina and buried in the cemetery of the martyr Priscilla, which he had made in her property, after he had converted her.<sup>6</sup> It seems more probable that this good lady was the enlightened one (*Lucina*), who collected his remains and interred them in her cemetery, than that they were two distinct persons.

St. Silvester was also buried in the cemetery of Priscilla.

This brings us to the time of the proclamation of the PEACE OF THE CHURCH, which put an end to the persecution, excepting a short one under Julian the apostate, which, however, seems to have been severe from the evidence of the catacombs, but that is entering on another question. There is no doubt about all that relates to the burial of several of the bishops and popes and martyrs in the cemetery of Calixtus in the third century, the inscriptions on the slabs that closed the *loculi*, or graves, are preserved, some in Greek characters, others in Latin. I have photographs of them all, and have given photo-engravings of the most important in plate iv of my book.<sup>7</sup> But for

1877, pp. 197 and 223. The earliest tombs that this diligent antiquary has been able to find are two sarcophagi of the fourth century, although he enumerates no less than 232 objects of archaeological interest in this crypt.

<sup>1</sup> *Anastasius*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>7</sup> Some say that these inscriptions in the catacombs are copies only, and that the originals were carried to the Vatican for security; if so, the copies are so exact that they are as good as the originals.

the earlier period the usual story is extremely improbable; that the Christians in the first and second centuries should be allowed to have burial places for their bishops in the temple of Apollo, in the palace of Nero, in the Vatican, seems hardly credible; there are no inscriptions of that period or from that burial place. This makes people accustomed to examine the evidence of history very doubtful of Roman Catholic traditions. It is generally considered by those who have studied the matter that the life of Pope Sylvester in the time of Constantine, given in Anastasius, is not genuine, but an interpellation of his own in the Bishop's Registers, which are for the most part genuine. The early history is said to have been written by Pope Damasus in the latter part of the fourth century, who also put so many inscriptions in the catacombs. After that time it seems to have been a custom of the early Christians that each succeeding bishop should write a short account of the works of his predecessor, and this custom was long continued, as we see by the Bishop's Registers of Lincoln of the middle ages, still preserved as of great value for the history of the churches of that great diocese, through, unfortunately, they have not yet been published. It happens that a large proportion of these paintings in the catacombs are just of the time of the celebrated forgery of the Decretals of St. Gregory, on which the system of the *temporal power* of the popes is based, and the forgery of several paintings for the pilgrims is probable. In the instance of the catacomb of St. Pontianus in the Trastevere there can be no doubt that this is the case. Anastasius, 111-112, records the bitter complaints of the Popes of the great damage done to the catacombs by the Lombards in the eighth century, when they besieged Rome, and blockaded it for some months. They did not succeed in entering the city, but they had ample time to destroy the catacombs, and they had especial spite against them, because the priests had received such large sums from the offerings of the faithful in the catacombs, and the Lombards announced that they made war upon the priests, not on the people of Rome. The strong expression used by Anastasius is that they *annihilated* the catacombs, and it is not likely that they left many of the paintings. Not a fourth part of that great subterranean cemetery or catacomb has been restored. In one place a wall of the ninth century is built across one of the corridors or passages, and behind that wall everything is left in ruin and confusion. On the front of the wall the figures of three saints are painted—Marcellinus, Pollius, and Petrus—of which I have a photograph No. 610, and have given a photo-engraving on Plate VII in my book. All the other paintings in that catacomb are of the same style of drawing, as are many others in the other catacombs, including some of those in the one got up for show to the modern pilgrims, St. Calixtus.<sup>1</sup> The two fine heads of Christ, so generally admired, are in the catacomb of Pontianus. The

<sup>1</sup> In the part restored of this catacomb it is quite evident that many of the walls are modern, but these are left plain without any paintings upon them. It is *possible* that all the restorations of the paintings were made for the pilgrims of the ninth century and not in the nineteenth, and that I was misinformed on this subject by a person whom I thought

I could depend upon in the first year that I was in Rome, or possibly I misunderstood him when he told me that all the paintings had been restored, and the figures of St. Cyprian and other saints introduced, he meant to say that this was done in the ninth century, though I did not so understand it.

art is not bad, but it is very different from that of the earlier period. The *copies* of them usually published are works in the style of the drawing of the nineteenth century, not of the ninth.

The popular story that the early Christians in time of persecution *lived* in the catacombs for concealment probably originated in an error; the locality called *catacumbas* was mistaken for the burial vaults first made in that valley. The monastery of St. Sebastian and the hermitage of St. Urban are both in that valley, and when the bishop and his chaplain went to reside for a time in one of these places they were said to have gone to reside *in catacumbis*, and this was afterwards understood to mean in these burial vaults. All the medical men in Rome are agreed that it would be *impossible* for any one to live many days in these vaults, and there is not the slightest sign of anything prepared for habitation in any one of them; but as each of these establishments was situated at the entrance of a long range of subterranean passages, which probably led from one to the other, and had many exits, known only to the Christian *fossores*, they afforded excellent opportunities of escape in case of danger. One of the Popes is said to have been seized when performing service in a chapel at the entrance to one of them, which is probably true; but any one who knows this chapel knows how near the surface it is, and that there is plenty of air and light there from a *luminarium* or well, for air and light which descends into it. This could not apply to the lower storeys of the catacombs. When Anastasius says<sup>1</sup> that St. Liberius, after his return from his exile in the time of Julian the apostate, resided for a time in the cemetery of St. Agnes, he did not mean in the vault, but in the imperial villa which was built in that large burial ground to which the mausoleum of Constantia belonged. He went to visit his cousin Constantius, until by his intervention and persuasion arrangements could be made for the return of Liberius to the city. The empress Constantia, who remained faithful to true Christianity, succeeded in persuading the emperors Constantius and Valens, who were Arians, to allow Liberius to return, and when he returned Felix, the Arian Pope, was deposed, and Liberius, the orthodox Pope, recalled to the city. There had been a persecution of the clergy and some martyrdoms just before under Julian the apostate, but these were now at an end.

In what I have said about the wall paintings in the catacombs I do not in the least mean to deny that there are several of the second and third centuries, but they are few in number, and the subjects of them are not scriptural or religious—they are merely ornamental. There is a vine spreading over the vault of the chapel just within one of the entrances to Prætextatus<sup>2</sup> (No. 1822), which is of the second century, and the same subject is on the vault of an entrance corridor to St. Nereus, Domitilla, &c., which is of the third. The Four Seasons (Nos. 618, 619) in this catacomb is probably of the third, though the

<sup>1</sup> *Anastasius* 51.

<sup>2</sup> On the wall of this chamber was a figure of the fourth century of the Good Shepherd, which I have seen many times. The last time was in 1876 with my friend Mr. Gambier Parry, who has paid much attention to the history of painting, and

who confirmed my view as to the date of this catacomb picture. To my surprise when I went again in 1877 with another friend to shew him the difference between the drawing of the second century and that of the fourth on the walls, that had disappeared during some recent repairs.

art is very bad for that period. Those in the *Capella Græca* (No. 612) in St. Priscilla are sometimes claimed as early, but are probably of the sixth century. It is very doubtful whether there is a single painting of a religious or scriptural subject before the time of Constantine and the "Peace of the Church." There is *one* small picture about two feet square on the flat soffit of an arch of a tomb (No. 1467),<sup>1</sup> which some good judges think *may be* of the third century, and this is made much of by the Roman Catholics.

On the other hand, the inscriptions are quite genuine and very interesting. There are the names—one in Greek, others in Latin—of four of the popes of the third century in St. Calixtus, and the numerous inscriptions by Pope Damasus in the fourth century shew that in his time the legends were believed. But there has evidently been a great deal of misunderstanding about them, as I have pointed out. The locality called "The Catacombs" being that in which the earliest of these underground tombs is found is an important point, which has been very much overlooked; that of *Prætextatus* seems to be the earliest, as there is brickwork of the time of Nero (No. 616) there at the entrance from a subterranean road, which has brick walls of the first century on each side of it with the burial vaults behind it. In one instance De Rossi discovered that the tomb of a martyr, which had been originally an *arco-solium* in the wall of this road, had been moved and put back to the further wall of a *cubiculum* or burial-vault in order that others might be buried in the same vault with the martyr, and it is said that large sums were paid for this privilege. This subterranean road is very curious; it is not an ordinary sandpit road, which often is the case, because such a road was very convenient for the *fossores* to send away the sand dug out in making these burial places: but this has well finished walls on both sides; it is not more than twenty feet from the surface, and appears to have been originally open at the top, as there are well finished cornices on the walls on both sides; it was probably vaulted over in the middle ages, when the roads were frequently brought up to the level of the ground. But this fosse-way, or hollow-way, was preserved as a subterranean road, apparently going along the valley called *Catacumbas*, from St. Urban's to St. Sebastian's. At least I have seen that there was an entrance from a sand pit, very near St. Urban's, which seemed to lead quite straight in that direction, but this is now closed by a modern brick wall, and on the other side of that wall the end is completely filled up with earth, which seems to have been recently brought there, when excavations were made in the other parts of this catacomb. There are two flights of steps down into it which would be wanted when the road was twenty feet deep. One theory is that there was a sort of promenade at that place, and that the steps led down into it at one end and up again at the other, but this does not seem very

<sup>1</sup> If the photograph from the original is compared with the very pretty drawing of it in Dr. Northcote's book no one would suppose that they are meant for the same picture. In the same catacomb is another celebrated picture of seven men carrying a wine-cask, to which the Roman Catholics attach a symbolical meaning, but which

appears to me to be over the grave of the wife of a vine-merchant. Under the painting when my photograph was taken was the following inscription:—

BONAVIÆ CONIVGI SANCTISSIMÆ.

Since my photograph was taken in which this inscription is legible, it has been removed by order of the authorities.

probable. The Via Appia is a fosse-way between the cemeteries of St. Calixtus and Prætextatus, the bank of earth on each side is twenty feet above the level of the road, the tombs are some on the banks and others behind them, and an entrance is cut through the bank to the tomb. This is the case at St. Calixtus, the path is cut to a pagan tomb, probably that of the family of Calixtus before they became Christians; a short flight of steps in that tomb leads down to a door which is not often seen, being below the surface, and which is rigorously kept locked, but behind the door it is seen that the steps continue to descend to a considerable depth, and evidently led into one of the corridors of the catacomb, but all the lower part is studiously kept full of earth, so that the connection cannot be seen, and another passage has been knocked through the wall on one side of the steps, from which there is a steep access to another part of the catacomb. The present entrance is at the other end of the vineyard above, and to the catacomb below, so that ladies have to go across the vineyard in all weathers to the new entrance, when they might just as well be permitted to enter at the original entrance close to the door from the road. A man stationed on the bank of the cemetery of St. Calixtus can see over a great part of that of Prætextatus on the other side of the road.

When Dr. Northcote says that *all* the catacombs are made in the tufa *LITHODA*, he goes too far: as regards St. Calixtus, of which De Rossi has given such an elaborate account, it is true no doubt, and it was of *this only* that the Cavaliere Michele Stefano De Rossi was thinking when he wrote that part of his brother's book; but Dr. Northcote has applied it to *the whole* of the catacombs, which is not by any means the case. That this particular kind of tufa suited the *fossores* best is evident; the sections of that of St. Cyriaca given in plate xxv of my book shew this plainly, and it is curious to see how the *fossores* have deviated to the right or left, up or down to avoid any hard rock, and used only that which suited their purpose (this is still better seen in the Historical Photographs, Nos. 1131, 1132, 1133). But the *fossores* had to make these burial vaults on the ground that belonged to those who employed them, and in the soil of that ground, whatever its nature might be; at least two of the catacombs are made in clay, one outside of the Porta di St. Pancrazio, the catacomb of that name, another is one of the three catacombs of the Jews; this is near the tomb of Cecilia Metella on the Via Appia, on the right hand, just beyond the Church of St. Sebastian, on a cross road connected with *Via di Sette Chiese*; it is one that is much neglected, and in wet weather it is hardly practicable to get into it, on account of the clay which almost fixes you where you stand. If there ever was a catacomb under St. Peter's on the Vatican Hill, it must have been in clay, as the greater part of that hill is clay, and the foundations of that enormous building are recorded to have been made in clay, and carried to a depth in proportion to the weight they have to carry. That of S. Pontianus is in alluvial soil.

Dr. Northcote charges me with inconsistency, because in different parts of my volume I have spoken of the beds of tufa in the campagna as being of a different thickness. He is evidently not aware of the enormous difference in this respect that there is in nature. In one instance there is a bed or layer of tufa not more than two or three

inches thick, which runs all through one of the catacombs at the same level. In other instances these beds or layers of tufa are twenty feet thick, and in these the sandpit and sandpit roads were made. The roads themselves are sandpits in a certain sense; that is, the tufa that has been cut out in making the roads when reduced to powder is Pozzalana sand, and answers the same purpose, and pits were made in these roads as more convenient. You may follow (as I have done in parts) a horse and cart along one of these subterranean roads for miles, and they have been in use for many centuries. The earliest trade of Rome was the exchange of Pozzalana sand for salt, and saltpits were made at Ostia by the kings for that purpose. This peculiar sand is still sent all over the world for iron casting at the present day; it was no doubt used for casting *bronzæ* before the use of iron. It has peculiar properties that no other sand has, which makes it specially suited for making the moulds for casting; it also makes the best mortar, from its gritty nature. Tufa varies extremely also in the degree of hardness that it has attained, and differs equally in colour and in many other respects. I have seen the same tufa wall appear of a dark colour while it was wet, and quite white when it was dry, and on the Aventine some of it is red from another pit close by. Some of it was hard enough to be used as building stone, and was used in large blocks in the time of the kings; but the builders were afraid to trust it to carry a weight, as may be seen in the walls of the Colosseum, where piers of travertine are used everywhere to carry the superstructure, and the intervals between these piers are filled up with the large blocks of tufa taken from one of the walls of the kings which had formed part of the second wall of Rome passing close by, and no longer of any use at the time that the Colosseum was built. The same variation may be seen in the natural beds; the *fossores* made use of that best suited for their purpose in the ground that was given to them for making these burial vaults; but this was purely accidental. There was no choice in the matter further than making these vaults a few feet above or below a certain level, the same bed of tufa being always at the same level. It was all originally volcanic dust from the volcanoes on the Alban hills, similar to what overwhelmed Pompeii from Vesuvius.

That my great work on the Archæology of Rome, of which the catacombs forms a tenth part, was dictated by any hostility to Roman Catholics, as Dr. Northcote assumes, I entirely deny. The work has grown under my hands from accidental circumstances far beyond anything that I contemplated when I began it. I saw that the Archæology of *Murray's Handbook*, the best book to be had, was a generation behind-hand, and I wished to remedy this, and so I was led on step by step at an enormous expenditure of money to this great work. I saw the importance of photography for historical objects, because no one could say that the artist had *doctored* his drawing to suit the views of his employer, as is too often done. I saw also that what I had to explain by the objects that I saw before me would not be believed in England, because they were so different from the established faith on the subject. I saw from the walls before my eyes that the early history of the City of Rome agrees remarkably with the old legends which English schoolmasters (who have generally adopted the modern notion that the old legends *are entirely false*) would not believe

either from words or drawings—they may, perhaps, eventually be convinced by photographs. I have no doubt that *truth* will prevail in the end, though I may not live to see it. In like manner for the early history of the Fine Arts, there is no place like Rome for examples. For the early history of Architecture the ruins of Rome give the most important information; for the history of Sculpture the collection formed by Winckelman, preparatory to writing his history, and still preserved in the Villa Albani, affords the best information; and the great collections in the Vatican, Capitoline, and other museums in Rome, are equally important.

For the history of Painting, or rather of Drawing, those in the catacombs are indispensable. They *seemed* to contradict the general history of Art, but this was only because people were generally ignorant of the numerous *restorations* of these wall paintings. It is obvious that the date of the actual painting is that of the man who restored it. I dislike the so-called restoration of some of our mediæval churches in England, the *sham Gothic* that has been so much the fashion, just as much as the restoration of these paintings. I never considered that polemics or religious questions had anything to do with the matter. The Roman Catholics themselves have always introduced that element, but the paintings do not prove Roman Catholicism. I have always maintained that one of the advantages of Archæology is that it is *neutral ground*, and Dr. Newman used to say that the room of the Archæologists was the only neutral ground in Oxford. Cardinal Antonelli also admitted this neutrality.

I have been into every one of the Roman catacombs at least once, and in some of them scores of times, and with many different persons sometimes very well informed. My object was to ascertain the *truth* about them, and if three-fourths of the paintings in the catacombs really are of the eighth or ninth century, I was bound to say so.<sup>1</sup> I enquired in the first instance of my Roman Catholic friend what was the most authentic book to give me the dates of them, and he told me Anastasius, and from this only I drew out my chronological table of these cemeteries. To assert, as Dr. Northcote does, that the name of *cemeteryum* included all the buildings in a large burial ground, and that the popes restored those buildings on the surface, not the burial vaults, is simply begging the question. I can find no such explanation of the word either in Scheller's excellent *Lexicon*, or in Ducange's admirable *Glossary* for mediæval usage. That it might include the burial chapels on the surface of the ground at the entrance to the subterranean cemeteries seems probable, only there is not a single instance of any of them having been *restored*, they are all in ruins; in some cases, indeed, they have been replaced by large churches, such as St. Agnes, St. Lorenzo, St. Sebastian's, St. Paul's, but these could hardly be called restorations only, nor do they occur in Anastasius as belonging especially to the catacombs, though each of them is at the entrance of a catacomb, and replaces a burial chapel. The *Archæological Journal* is very properly not the place for polemics. I have studiously avoided them, and confined myself to archæological ground.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Northcote would be rather surprised if he knew who first told me that three-fourths of the paintings belonged to that period.