

Emperor Constantine, the first Christian emperor of Rome, ordered to build a basilica on Vatican Hill. The location was symbolic: this was the place where Saint Peter, the chief apostle, was buried in 64 A.D. A small shrine already existed on the site but it was now replaced by a new building church was completed around 349 A.D.

St. Peter's Church

The first thought in Rome is of St. Peter's. We have, of course, often been there, for when there is nothing else immediately to occupy our attention, we can repair to this mighty temple, and find a subject for study which is inexhaustible. Instead, however, of vainly attempting a description - for every effort of this kind for centuries has proved that no words can give any idea of this unrivalled edifice - we would rather note down a few of the impressions left upon the mind.

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The way which led to it was through a series of narrow winding streets, crowded with a miserable population, deeply demoralized, and crushed to the earth by indigence. At length we reached the Castle of St. Angelo, and from this spot a broad avenue opened before us to the massive colonnades of St. Peter's. Our first view of the exterior by day-light disappointed us, for when seen from this point it is certainly not imposing. The facade is allowed to be disproportioned to the building, and too much conceals the dome. We have since examined, in the library of the Vatican, a copy of Michael Angelo's original plan, in which this defect is avoided, and the whole front appears more grand and striking. His drawing of the facade closely resembles the portico of the Pantheon.

In the open square in front stands an ancient obelisk, which points up to heaven, tapering away as if it seemed to lose itself in the air. Caligula brought it from "old hushed Egypt" to adorn his baths, and a Pope placed it in front of St. Peter's. On each side of it is a fountain, which flings up its column of water, as if into

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St. Peter's church is truly impressive building itself. The largest church in the world, it has a 218 meter long nave. The basilica's dome, designed by Michelangelo is the largest dome in the world measuring 42m in diameter and reaching 138 meter high (more than 450ft).

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the clouds, where it seems to pause for a moment, reflecting back the changing colors of the sky, and then falling into its porphyry basin, the thousand hues are lost in one dazzling sheet of foam. But who pauses to dwell on these when the temple itself is before them? We ascend the broad marble step8-put aside the heavy curtain which veils the entrance-and the sensations of the next few minutes are worth a year of common-place life.

The first effect on everyone must be bewildering.

He sees gathered before him treasures of art of which before he could scarcely have conceived, and all enshrined in a building which mocks any comparison with the gorgeous temple of Jerusalem, or those magnificent fanes which the worshippers of

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the old mythology raised to their fabled deities. For more than three centuries, the energies and wealth of thirty-five pontiffs were devoted to this work, and the aid of the whole Christian world was invoked to render it a temple worthy of the Most High. Eustace estimates that the building itself cost twelve millions sterling. Everywhere, indeed, we see marbles, bronzes, and precious materials, which were gathered in Rome during the luxurious days of the empire, but are nowhere else to be found in such profusion. We realize, indeed, that here man has exhausted the treasures of his genius and his worldly wealth.

Almost every traveler states that his first impressions were those of disappointment. The interior did not appear as vast as he expected. The reason of this undoubtedly is, because we have no received experience by which to judge its proportions. The eyes are "fools of the senses;" and here occurs a case in which they have not been trained to convey a correct estimate. But with me, I confess, this was not the case. Having been told so often that I should be disappointed, I was prepared for it, and

therefore expected too little. Slowly we passed up the nave, until we found ourselves opposite to the High Altar. Above it rises a canopy, more than a hundred and thirty feet in height, its twisted columns of Corinthian brass covered with golden foliage, while beneath rests the body of St. Peter, around whose tomb a hundred lamps are burning day and night. We stand under the dome and look up, when an abyss seems to open above us. We can scarcely believe that its top is four hundred feet from the marble pavement. . The inscription on the frieze does not seem very large, yet each letter is six feet high, and the pen in the hand of St. Mark is of the same length, although from where we stand the whole figure of the saint does not appear to be much beyond the ordinary stature. The mighty dome expands above us like the firmament, and within are pictured in rich mosaic the saints and celestial spirits

looking upward and worshipping towards the throne of the Eternal, which, encircled with radiance, crowns this dizzy height.

* -----" Our outward sense
Is but of gradual grasp - and as it is
That what we have of feeling most intense
Outstrips our faint expression; even so this
Outshining and o'erwhelming edifice,
Fools our fond gaze, and greatest of the great,
Defies at first our nature's littleness,
Till, growing with its growth, we thus dilate
Our spirits to the size of that they contemplate,"
[Childe Harold.]

At our first visit we spent almost the whole day going over each part in detail, and every little while stopping, and vainly endeavoring by one effort of the mind to grasp the mighty proportions of the building. The figures which occasionally moved across the marble pavement seemed dwarfed into pigmies, and we could scarcely realize that this vast structure, with its gorgeous profusion of paintings, and marbles, and gilding, could have been erected by those who, in comparison, appeared so insignificant. This church has indeed a spirit within it, which is possessed by none other that we have ever entered. It is sufficient to preserve a faith in existence centuries after its life has gone.

The very temperature of the building is remarkable, being always uniform; mild and pleasant in winter, and cool in summer, when the heat of the sun is so intense above as almost to melt the lead. Professor Play fair accounts for it on the supposition that the immense edifice absorbs so much heat during the summer, that it never wholly discharges it throughout the winter. However this may be, the atmosphere is always delightful-no damp air is perceived - nothing but the slight perfume of the incense which is wafted from some side chapel where service is performing.

We passed around, and wandered from aisle to aisle, and from chapel to chapel, finding on all sides the same lavish magnificence. Every thing is in perfect keeping, the statues themselves being gigantic to harmonize with the building. Around us were the gorgeous monuments of the Popes, on which the ablest sculptors of the last three centuries had exhausted their skill - the masterpiece of Canova erected to the memory of Clement XIII., with its Genius of Death, holding the inverted torch, and the sleeping lion below, the finest efforts of the modern chisel- and the marble group of the Virgin supporting "the dead Christ," a most touching work, which first established the fame of Michael Angelo. There was one, before which we particularly paused, because it bore, sculptured on the enduring marble, so plain a record of the high-handed oppression of the papal power during the middle ages. It was the tomb of the celebrated Countess Matilda, who, in the days of Hildebrand, was the powerful ally of the Church, bequeathing to it also at her death her valuable patrimony in Tuscany, a portion of which is still held by the papal see. Living in the very crisis of that conflict between the feudal system and the power of the Church, so well did she aid the latter in gaining its triumph, that she deserved her burial place in its noblest temple. Five centuries after her death, Urban VIII. removed her body from the Benedictine Monastery, near Mantua; and deposited it beneath this stately monument. Does that statue, which Bernini has placed above her tomb, represent

her as she was in her living day? We may believe so, for it embodies our own idea of that stern woman, as she sits there frowning in the marble, holding in her hands the keys and the papal tiara. But it is on the sides of the sarcophagus below that we see portrayed the scene she aided to bring about, and which she considered her chief glory.

When Henry, the young emperor of Germany, had been excommunicated by Gregory VII., to obtain an interview with his rival, and rescue himself from the anathema, he was obliged to cross the Alps in the depth of winter, over fields and precipices of ice which could only be traversed on foot. His object was to throw himself at the pontiff's feet and obtain absolution; but he found this spiritual autocrat in Matilda's strong mountain fortress of Canossa in the Apennines, and for a time every avenue was barred against him. At length Gregory consented that the emperor should enter the fortress in the garb of a penitent to receive his sentence. Then was witnessed what we may well consider the most extraordinary scene in the annals of the papacy. It was on a morning in January, 1077, when the cold was intense, the mountain streams frozen, and the ground white with snow, that earth's greatest monarch of that day was seen, bare-footed and clothed only in a thin linen penitential garment, toiling mournfully and alone up to the rocky castle of Canossa. He passed two gateways, but found the third closed against him. It was at sunrise that he appeared in this humiliating state, and there he remained hour after hour, cold and faint, the object of wonder to the crowds which had gathered to the spectacle. But the gates opened not; and at sunset he was forced to retire, the object of his bitter penance still unaccomplished. Again the dawning day found him at his post, bumbled and dispirited, while within the castle the proud pontiff, who was trampling him to the ground, held his regal court with princes gathered around him. Yet the second day passed like the first, and the third followed it, while the wretched king was suing in vain for admittance, and Gregory was prolonging, what has been well termed, "this profane and hollow parody on the real workings of the broken and contrite heart." But human endurance could bear it no longer, and the monarch rushed from this scene of suffering to a neighboring chapel, to beseech on his knees the intercession of his kinswoman Matilda and the venerable abbot of Cluni. For several days all within the castle, even with tears, had entreated the pope to end this painful scene, and reproaches of wanton tyranny were heard from his own adherents; but he remained inexorable. At length, when Henry had reached the fourth day of his penance, Gregory consented that, still bare-footed and in his penitential garment, he should be brought into his presence.

This is the point of time which the artist has chosen. The youthful king - for he was only twenty-six - reduced at last to vassalage to the church - his fiery spirit utterly crushed by the misery of the last three days, and the shame that weighed him down - crouches abjectly at the feet of his oppressor, as if submitting his neck to be trodden on. The Italian courtiers are around, the witnesses of his degradation, while above him stands Gregory, proud and haughty in his mien - the very incarnation of mitred tyranny. Matilda is there, rejoicing in her kinsman's indignities - and Hugh, the abbot of Cluni, who had administered to Henry in his infancy the rite of baptism - and Azzo, marquis of Este - and Adelaide of Susa, and her son Amadeus - all calmly beholding these acts of spiritual despotism and relentless severity, performed by one claiming to be the vicar of Him who was "meek and lowly of heart."

Is this a scene which it is well to perpetuate in the unchanging marble? On one occasion at least it would have been better for the papal power if this record of its triumph had not been quite so prominent. We are told that on the visit of the

Emperor Joseph II. to St. Peter's, when he came to this monument, he regarded it for a moment with fixed attention, and then turned away with a blush of indignation and a bitter smile. We all know the Kaiser's future course; but might not the remembrance of that hour in St. Peter's have strengthened his purpose of a philosophical reformation, to depress and curb, in his own dominions, a power which could become so tyrannous?

"There is but one painting in St. Peter's: see if you can find it!" said a friend to me the day before our first visit. As we looked round the church his words recurred to us, and we wondered what he could have meant. There was an immense picture over every altar, and in every chapel, and we recognized copies of the noblest masterpieces on sacred subjects. It was not until we had been there some hours that we discovered, with one exception, they were mosaics, the colors and lights and shades being all so admirably imitated, that they rival the choicest works of the pencil. And probably centuries after the hues on the canvas have faded, these brilliant copies will preserve to the world a true record of the artist's genius. Time has already wrought its changes in the Transfiguration of Raphael, yet here is a duplicate in the unchanging stone, which even now begins to convey a truer idea of that great painter's conception than the much cherished original in the Vatican. How deeply is it to be regretted, that among them we have not Da Vinci's Last Supper, which exists now only as a fresco at Milan, the damp fast obliterating its colors, so that to the next generation its beauty will be entirely gone! "How long will that picture last?" Napoleon once asked, as he was looking at a beautiful painting. "Perhaps five hundred years," was the answer. "And such," said the emperor, with a smile of scorn, "is a painter's immortality!" The builders of this magnificent pile seem to have shared these feelings, and to have determined that nothing should be here which in the lapse of time might perish.

But in the wide Transepts is a sight which cannot but arrest the attention of everyone who is sighing for Catholic unity, and remind him of those days when every nation acknowledged the same faith, and with one voice professed the same creed. There, are arranged the boxes for the confessional in every language. Not only are those of Europe to be seen inscribed over these places, but also its various dialects, and the strange tongues of the East. Thus the wanderer from every land, who worships in these rites, beholds provision made for his spiritual wants. "There is one spot where the pilgrim always finds his home. We are all one people when we come before the altar of the Lord." * Such are represented as the words of Marco Polo, in the thirteenth century, and here, to the member of the Church of Rome, they are realized. He comes to what he regards as the Mother Church of Christendom, and learns that he is not a stranger or an alien. He can unburden himself to a priest of his own land, and the consolations of his faith are doubly sweet when conveyed to him in the familiar words of "his own tongue, wherein he was born." With the errors of Rome we have no sympathy; we feel and realize how much she has fallen from the simplicity of the faith; yet Catholic traits like this, none but the most prejudiced can refuse to admire. They show the far-reaching wisdom of that church-that, overlooking the distinctions of climate and country, and recognising her field of labor to extend wherever there is a degraded being to listen to her message, she is resolute to "inherit the earth."

But this vast edifice is never filled, not even, we are told, upon the coronation of a Pope. It is only, indeed, on a few great festivals that service is performed in the body of the church, for ordinarily one of the side chapels is used, and the High Altar stands lonely and deserted. Even Eustace, though a priest of the Church, inquires,

why "the Pontiff, surrounded by his clergy, does not himself perform every Sunday the solemn duties of his station, presiding in person over the assembly, instructing his flock, like the Leos and Gregories of ancient times, with his own voice, and with his own hands administering to them the 'bread of life; and 'the cup of salvation? ' " Such a sight would indeed be one both affecting and sublime.

There is much, however, to detract from our pleasure in the survey of this unrivalled temple. The very inscription on the front, instead of dedi. eating it to Him who alone should be worshipped here, states that it is consecrated by Paul V. - IN HONOREM PRINCIPIS APOSTOLORUM. We pause to inspect the bas reliefs on the magnificent bronze doors, and are transported back to the days of heathenism. The artist drew his inspiration from no source more hallowed than the Metamorphoses of Ovid; and Ganymede and the Eagle, with Leda and the Swan-the latter group more spirited than chaste-figure on the doors of this Christian temple. Advance to the High Altar, and near it, on a pedestal about four feet high, stands an old bronze statue, which the sceptical antiquary will tell you was once a Jupiter, by a slight change transformed into an undoubted St. Peter. However this may be, it is now a mere instrument of superstition, and through the whole day crowds may be seen kneeling before it in earnest prayer. Their devotions ended, they approach, kiss the extended foot - which is almost worn off by this constant friction - press their foreheads to it, "and the process is ended. Has the Romanist any reason to laugh at the poor Mussulman, who performs a pilgrimage to Mecca, to kiss the black stone of the Caaba? On St. Peter's day this image is clothed in magnificent robes - the jeweled tiara placed upon its head - the jeweled collar around its neck-soldiers are stationed by its side, and lighted candles burning about it. A clergyman of the Church of England, who was present on this occasion last year, told me, that the effect of the black image thus arrayed was perfectly ludicrous; and with the people all kneeling before it, had he not known he was in a Christian church, he should have supposed himself in a heathen temple, and that, the idol.

In the massive columns which support the dome, are preserved some holy relics, which are only shown with much ceremony from a high balcony, during Passion Week, A portion of the true Cross -the head of St. Andrew-the lance of St. Longinus (with which our Savior was pierced)-and the Sudarium. or handkerchief, containing the impression of our Lord's features-form a part of this sacred treasury. Unfortunately, there are divers other lances of similar pretensions-one at Nuremberg, and another in Armenia. With the Sudarium, it is still worse, there being six rival ones shown in different places, viz., Turin. Milan, Cadoin in Perigort, Besancon, Compeign, and Aix-la-Chapollc ; while that at Cadoin has fourteen bulls to declare it genuine, and that at Turin, four. The learned, however, solve the difficulty by saying, that the handkerchief applied to our Lord's face consisted of several folds, consequently the impression of the countenance went through them all, and they are all genuine! *

One more item, and I have done with this disagreeable portion of the subject. Pass the High Altar, and at the farther extremity of the Church is a magnificent throne of bronze and gilt, surmounted by a canopy, and supported by four colossal gilt figures of St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. Chrysostom, and St. Athanasius, Within is a chair, which tradition tells us is the identical one in which St. Peter sat when he officiated as Bishop of Rome. Some twenty years ago, Lady Morgan gave to the world another story of this wonderful relic. She states that 'when the French held Rome, their sacrilegious curiosity induced them to break through the splendid casket for the purpose of seeing the sacred chair. Upon its mouldering and dusty surface were

traced carvings, which bore the appearance of letters. The chair was quickly brought into a better light, the dust and cobwebs removed, and the inscription faithfully copied. The writing is in Arabic characters, and is the well known confession of Maliometau faith - "There is but one God, and Mahomet is his prophet." The story, she adds, has since been hushed up; the chair replaced, and none but the unhallowed remember the fact, and none but the audacious repeat it." Dr. Wiseman takes miladi to task with great severity, and asserts that it is an ancient curule chair, evidently of Roman workmanship, and may therefore reasonably be supposed to have been used as an Episcopal throne when St. Peter was received into the house of the Senator Pudens at Rome. The truth probably is, that it was brought from the East among the spoils of the Crusaders- presented to St. Peter's at a time when antiquarian research was not much in fashion - and now, its origin has been forgotten.

But to continue the account of our visit, The hours went by, and we could not leave this spot which had been thought and dreamed of for so many years. We realised the feelings of the imaginative author of Vathek, when he wrote, "I wish his Holiness would allow me to erect a little tabernacle within this glorious temple. I should desire no other prospect during the winter; no other sky than the vast arches glowing with golden ornaments, so lofty as to lose all glitter or gaudiness. We would take our evening walks on the field of marble; for is not the pavement vast enough for the extravagance of this appellation? Sometimes, instead of climbing a mountain, we should ascend the cupola, and look down on our little encampment below. At night I should wish for a constellation of lamps dispersed about in clusters, and so contrived as to diffuse a mild and equal light. Music should not be wanting; at one time to breathe in the subterranean chapels, at another to echo through the dome;"

But the melody which Beckford desired, we were soon to hear. A side door opened - forth came a procession, a cardinal and long array of priests and we followed them to see what service was at hand. They swept across the church, paused for a moment in the centre, and sunk upon their knees, with their faces turned to the High Altar, and then entered the chapel called the Capella del Cora. It was the hour for Vespers, which at once commenced. There were perhaps twenty in the choir, by whom the principal part of the service was performed, while nearly two hundred more, - prebendaries, canons, clerks, and choristers- were seated in the chapel and joined in the responsive parts. It was the first time we had heard the Pope's choir, so celebrated throughout the world, and yet our expectations were more than realized. They still use those old austere chants of surpassing beauty, which have been handed down to them through centuries-the Lydian and Phrygian tunes, first introduced into the 'Western Churches by St. Ambrose. St. Augustine listened to them in the church of Milan, when he represents himself as being melted to tears, and even expressed the fear lest such harmonious airs might be too tender for the manly spirit of Christian devotion.* Mingled with these were the richer Roman chants which were collected by Gregory the Great, and bear his name. They sang the Psalms for the evening, and I rejoice that I knew they were uttering inspired words, for the music, as it swept by us in a perfect flood of harmony, seemed too sweet and heavenly to be addressed to any but God alone. The organ mingled its rich mellow tones with the voices which were thus pouring out their melody, sweet incense filled the chapel as they flung high their golden censers, and we remained listening to the delicious sounds until the whole was over, and the procession once more took its way through the church.

As we followed them out, we found the sun "as setting, and we stayed to watch the effect of the gathering darkness. The church was untenanted, save by some solitary worshipper kneeling apart, and no sound was heard except now and then the light tread of a Sacristan as he crossed the marble pavement. Gradually the shadows deepened-the building appeared more vast and solemn - the hundred lights which are ever burning around the tomb of St. Peter seemed like distant twinkling stars - the statues on the monuments grew more wan and phantom-like-and we departed, repeating to ourselves those striking lines of the pilgrim poet-

*"But thou, of temples old, or altars new,
Standest alone - with nothing like to thee -
Worthiest of God, the holy and the true;
Since Zion's desolation, when that He
Forsook his former city, what could be,
Of earthly structures, in his honor pil'd,
Of a sublimer aspect? Majesty,
Power, glory, strength, and beauty - all are aisled
In this eternal ark of worship undefil'd,"*

Yesterday it rained, and the sun this morning rose with that cloudless beauty, which is so often seen when the atmosphere has just been cleared by a storm. The air was perfectly still and clear, and we determined to avail ourselves of the opportunity to ascend the dome of the church. Having procured the necessary permit from the cardinal secretary of state, we were admitted, and commenced the ascent by a broad stone staircase, so slightly inclined that mules walk up it with their loads. After a time it narrows, and winds around between the inner and outer domes, until passing through a door, we find ourselves on a light gallery in the interior, more than three hundred feet above the pavement. The brain becomes dizzy as we look down, and see men appearing like insects crawling far below. The mosaic pictures which line the dome, and from the pavement looked so fair and beautifully shaded, here seem coarse, and the figures are gigantic. Nowhere else can we realize the unparalleled vastness of this edifice, and for a time we stood and looked down in silence, while from one of the side chapels there came faintly and fitfully the swell of voices and the music of the organ, as some priests were performing there the morning service.

From thence we ascended to the exterior gallery on the top of the dome. Here was spread out before us the same glorious prospect which we had already seen from the Senator's tower on the Capitoline hill. The morning sun was pouring down its beams, flooding the whole landscape with brightness. White, fleecy clouds still lingered about the distant Apennines, while a line of mist stretching far over the Campagna, showed the course of the Tiber. There, every thing spoke of repose and desolation, and the country spread out like a prairie with none to occupy it. We felt as did Rogers, when he asked-

*"Have none appeared as tillers of the ground,
None since they went - as tho' it still were theirs,
And they might come and claim their own again?
Was the last plough a Roman's?"*

Below us were the formal gardens of the pope with their sparkling fountains, and orange groves loaded with fruit, while a palm tree growing near, and the stony pines, with their flat dark tops dispersed about, seemed to increase the oriental illusion of the scene. We walked over the stone roof of this mighty building, which

covers an extent of several acres. How strange it seems to find at this dizzy height the habitations of human beings! Yet here are the houses of the workmen who are always employed in the repairs of the edifice, so that we seem to be in the midst of a little village. A fountain, too, is playing by our side, throwing its water into a marble basin, and while the lofty parapet cuts off all view beyond, we can scarcely realize that we are not treading on the ground. About us were traces of countless pilgrims, who during the last two centuries had climbed to the same lofty elevation, and left there their names and the dates of their visits. Among them was an Italian name carved deeply into one of the bronze balls of the railing around the gallery, with the date 1627. Perhaps this is the only trace the individual has left of his existence on the earth!

From this highest gallery, at the foot of the stem which supports the ball and cross, a small iron ladder enables visitors to ascend into the ball itself. It is of bronze gilt, seven and a half feet in diameter, and will accommodate a small party. There is something, however, in the idea of being enclosed in a ball four hundred and thirty feet from the ground, which gives the visitor an uneasy feeling. It seems to vibrate and tremble - he remembers how small is the metal stem which sustains it - and being, in addition, almost roasted by the rays of the sun on the thin copper, he is generally contented with a very short sojourn at this aerial height. Instead of a cross, the ball was once surmounted by a large pine of bronze, which had before ornamented the top of the tomb of Hadrian. Being thrown down from St. Peter's by lightning, it was transferred to the gardens of the Vatican, where it now stands by the side of the great Corridor of Belvidere. It was here in the days of Dante, for when describing one of the monsters in the Inferno, he says-

*"His visage seem'd
In length and bulk, as doth the pine that tops
St. Peter's Roman fane."*

'We descended again to the church, and finding one of the sacristans, proceeded to visit the crypts beneath it. He conducted us down a stairs under one of the side altars, and at its foot, fixed in the wall, is a marble slab, the inscription on which states that females are not permitted to descend into these vaults except on Whitsunday-on which day men are excluded-and if any infringe this regulation, they are anathematized. The reason of this absurd rule we could not discover. We have here below us, probably, the most ancient church pavement in existence; for when the present sumptuous temple was erected over the first church, the pavement was left untouched. This spot indeed was chosen by Constantine for the first religious edifice he erected, because it was a part of the Circus of Nero, and consecrated by the blood of numberless martyrs who were slaughtered in its arena.

Immediately below the high altar is what is called the tomb of St. Peter. As we stood beside it, we thought what would be the feelings of the humble fisherman of Galilee, could he rise from his martyr-grave, wherever it may be, and behold the gorgeous ceremonies of the temple which is called by his name. The purity of the faith for which he died, perverted - the simplicity of ancient worship deformed by countless rites, partaking of the "pride and pomp and circumstance" of Pagan rituals - the Gospel mingled up with strange legends from the old mythology- his own name, which he only wished to be "written in heaven," now exalted above all human fame, and made an argument for blinding superstition- how would his lofty rebuke startle the thousands kneeling here, and echo even through the halls of the Vatican, as he summoned all away from the "cunningly-devised fables" which are taught in this

glorious shrine, to those changeless and immutable truths which are to last while" eternity grows grey!"

As we passed around, we beheld on all sides small chapels where lights are ever kept burning, and which are regarded as places of peculiar sanctity. Wherever we turned, we saw the tombs of those who for their services in the cause of the Church, or their extraordinary holiness, had been thought worthy of a resting-place in this unequalled temple. Here, covered with bas-reliefs, to illustrate Scripture history, is the rich sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, prefect of Rome, who died A.D. 359. Here lie buried, Otho II. of Germany; Charlotte, Queen of Jerusalem and Cyprus; the last members of the royal family of Stuart, and many of the popes. Unlike most vaults of the kind, there is no dampness in the atmosphere, nor that chilliness which speaks so plainly of the grave, and it seemed as if the very balminess of the air took from us all thoughts of the tomb. When we again ascended, and dropped the fee into the hand of the smiling young priest, we found it difficult to realize that we had been treading on a spot where, for fifteen centuries, the great and noble had found their burial place.