

blows gently and cautiously, so as to avoid a falling-in of the rock, which would not only have marred our hopes, but would, besides, have caused a great disaster. The vault of rocks suspended over our heads might bury us all alive, and, as will be seen by the sequel, the precautions we had taken were not fruitless. At the moment when our hopes were about to be realised,—the aperture being now wide enough to admit of us passing through it—suddenly and above our heads we heard a hollow prolonged rustling noise that froze us to death; the vault had been shaken, and we dreaded its falling upon us. For a moment, which seemed to us, however, very long, we were all terrified; the Indian himself was standing as motionless as a statue, with his hands upon the handle of his pick-axe, just in the same position as he was when he gave his last blow. After a moment's solemn silence, when our fright had a little subsided, we began to examine the nature of the danger we had just escaped. Above our heads a long and wide split ran along the vault to a distance of several yards, and, at the place where it stopped, an enormous rock, detached from the dome, had been most providentially impeded in its fall downwards by one of the columns, which, acting as a sort of buttress, kept it suspended over the opening we had just made. Having, after mature examination, ascertained that the column and the rock were pretty solid, like rash men accustomed to defy all danger and surmount any sort of obstacle or difficulty, we resolved upon gliding one by one into the dangerous yawning. Dr. Geny, who till then had kept a profound silence, on hearing of our resolution was suddenly seized with such panic of fear that he recovered his voice, imploring and begging of us to take him out of the cavern; and, as if he had been suddenly seized with a sort of vertigo, he told us, with interrupted accents, that he could not breathe—that he felt himself as if he were smothering—that his heart was beating so violently, were he to stay any longer amidst the dangers we were running, he was certain of dying from the effects of a rupture of the heart. He offered all he possessed on earth to him that would save his life, and with clasped hands he supplicated our Indians not to forsake him, but to guide him out of the place. We therefore took compassion on his state of mind and suffered the Indian to guide him out; but as soon as the latter returned, and having ascertained during his absence that neither the rocky fragment nor the column had stirred, but which had been the momentary cause of our alarm, we put our project into execution, and like serpents, one after the other, we crawled into the dangerous opening, which was scarcely large enough for our passing through. We soon ceased thinking of our past dangers, nor did our present imprudence much pre-occupy our minds, all our attention being entirely absorbed by what presented itself to our ravished eyes. Here we were in the midst of a saloon wearing a most fairy aspect, and, by the light of our torches, the vault, the floor, and the wall were shining

and dazzling, as if they had been covered over with the most admirably transparent rock-crystal. Even in some places did the hand of men seem to have presided over the ornamenting of this enchanted palace. Numberless stalactites and stalagmites, as pellucid as the limpid stream that has just been seized by the frost, assumed here and there the most fantastic forms and shapes—they represent brilliant draperies, rows of columns, lustres, and chandeliers. At one end, close to the wall, was to be seen an altar, with steps leading up to it, and which seemed in expectation of the priest to celebrate divine service. It would be impossible for my pen to describe everything that transported us with joy, and drew forth our admiration; we really imagined ourselves to be in one of the Arabian Nights' palaces, and the Indians themselves were far from guessing the one-half of the wonders we had just discovered.

Having left this dazzling palace, we continued our under-ground ramble, penetrating more and more into the bowels of the earth, following step by step a winding labyrinth, but which for a whole half-league offered nothing remarkable to our view, except now and then the sight of the very great dangers our undaunted curiosity urged us on to. In certain parts the vault no longer presented the aspect as being solid as stone, earth alone seemed to be its component parts; and here and there, recent proofs of falling-in showed us that still more considerable ones might take place, and cut off from us all means of retreat. Nevertheless we pushed on still far beyond our present adventurous discovery, and at last arrived at a new, magnificent, and extensive space, all bespangled, like the first with brilliant stalactites, and in no way inferior to the former in gorgeous beauty of its details. Here again we gave ourselves up to the most minute examination of the many wonders surrounding us, and which shone like prisms by the light of our torches. We gathered from off the ground several small stalagmites, as large and as round as hazel-nuts, and so like that fruit, when preserved, that some days later, at a ball at Manila, we presented some of them to the ladies, whose first movement was to put them to their mouth; but soon finding out their mistake, they entreated to be allowed to keep them, as they said, converted into carrying drops. Having fully enjoyed the beautiful and brilliant spectacle presented to our eyes, we now began to feel the effects of hunger and fatigue. We had been walking in this subterranean domain to the extent of more than three miles, had taken no rest or refreshment since morning, and the day was already far advanced.

I have often experienced that our moral strength decreases in proportion as our physical strength does; and of course we must have been in that state when sinister suppositions took possession of our imaginations. One of our party communicated to us a reflection he had just made—which was, that a falling-in might have taken place between us and the issue from the grotto; or, what appeared still more probable,