

old palaces and convents, covered with the wild ivy and the vine,—
beautiful even in decay—

“Each ruined tower and stone
Pleads haughtily for glories gone.”

In the early part of the eighteenth century it must have been a city of great wealth and beauty,—its religious edifices beyond all number in proportion to its size. You can hardly walk a quarter of a mile in any direction without seeing the evidences of former greatness—the massive structures—the moss-grown walls the bastions and parapets of its former defences—the sentinel towers—the guarded gates—the covered approaches. No doubt, under the panoplied chivalry of old Spain, under the Pizarros, DeSotos, and Carvajals, they must have been impregnable to the half-armed natives; but at the present day, Strangway's shells, and “Armstrongs,” or Foster's Batteries would knock them to pieces in a short time.

Of these structures apparently but two at the present time remain for use: one a convent, turned into a soldiers' barrack; the other the Cathedral of Panama. The latter must have been a noble building in its day. It faces on the Plaza, and is approached by a broad flight of steps leading to a terrace: two lofty towers stand on either side, and three great portals lead into the body of the building. A Latin inscription along the architrave, almost effaced by time, shews it to have been built upwards of two centuries ago. Externally the stone is chipping and wearing away, and large crevices along the front show plainly that unless soon attended to, it will share the fate of its former companions. The interior was once magnificently decorated, and is capable of holding many thousand worshippers. Several small chapels branch off on either side, and were formerly adorned with beautiful statuary representing the Crucifixion and other Scriptural scenes connected with the Saints and the Virgin Mary. The remains of the gilding and adornments may still be seen; but the whole place has been shamefully pillaged by the buccaneers and pirates in early days, and by the successive revolutionary parties, which during the last fifty years have succeeded each other for a time in seizing the government of Central America. These chapels and the whole buildings now present the most melancholy appearance: tawdry decorations fail to supply the place of former grandeur; and the confessional boxes themselves are mouldering away. The Cathedral is opened for service every morning, and the Roman Catholic