

been finished. The walls are pierced with great windows, that were formerly ornamented with pictures in Mosaic, and passages from Scripture in Greek and Latin, the traces of which still remain. The Christian sect of the Armenians are in possession of the nave I describe. This nave is separated from the three other branches of the Cross by a wall, and in such a manner that the Church is not now united to it.—When you pass this wall, you find yourself opposite the sanctuary of the choir, which occupies the top of the cross.—This choir is raised three steps above the nave. We there saw an altar, dedicated to the Magi, and on the pavement at the foot of the altar, observed a star of Marble.

Tradition says that this star corresponds with the point in the heavens, where the miraculous star that conducted the three kings to this place, rested. Certain it is, that the spot where the Saviour was born in the subterraneous Church of the Manger, is perpendicularly under this marble star. The Greeks occupy the sanctuary of the Magi, so that the two other limbs of the cross are waste, and without altars.—Two stair cases, of fifteen steps each, open at the two sides of the exterior Church, and descend to the subterraneous Church under the choir. This is the place that has been ever revered as the birth-place of the Lord. Before we entered, the superior put a wax light into my hand, and made a short exhortation.

The holy grotto is irregular, because it occupies the place of the stable and manger. It is thirty seven feet and a half long, eleven feet wide, and nine feet high. It is cut in a rock, the wall of which is encrusted with marble, and the pavement is also of precious

marble. These decorations are attributed to St. Helen. It receives no light from without, but is lighted by thirty four lamps, the gifts of different princes. At the eastern extremity of this grotto, is the spot where the Virgin gave birth to the Redeemer of man.—This place is distinguished by a white marble flag, encrusted with jasper, and surrounded by a circle of silver, which is radiated in the form of a sun. These words are eugraved around it :

*Hic, de Vergine Maria,  
Jesus Christus Natus Est.*

*Here, of the Virgin Mary,  
Jesus Christ was born.*

A marble table, that serves for an altar rests against the rock above the place where the Messiah was born. This altar is lighted by three lamps, the finest of which was given by Louis XIII. Seven steps from this spot, nearer the south, you find the manger, and descend to it by two steps, for it is not on a level with the rest of the grotto, but sunk in the rock. A block of white marble, raised a foot and a half above the soil, and excavated in the form of a cradle, indicates the place where the Sovereign of Heaven was laid upon straw. At two paces opposite the cradle is the place where Mary sat when she presented the Child of Sorrow to the adoration of the three kings. Nothing can be more delightful than this subterraneous Church. It is enriched with pictures from the Italian and Spanish schools. The general ornament of the manger is blue satin, embroidered with silver, and incense burns without ceasing before the cradle of the Saviour. I have seen the inhabitants of this desert communicate at the altar of the Magi, with a fervour and piety unknown to the Christians of the west. No place in the universe in-