

weirdest, most curious structures one was ever in. This lofty, and extraordinary pile rises in terraces, on the sides of the precipice, which here takes the form of an amphitheatre, and, amid the bewildering labyrinths of caves and cells, winding stairs, corridors, natural cavities and constructed chambers, you can scarcely tell which is rock and which is dwelling. There is such a getting up and down stairs, such a winding through labyrinths and chapels, and through cells and hanging gardens—in one of which a solitary palm tree is shown that was planted by St. Saba, in the fourth century, and is now nearly one thousand five hundred years old. We first make a descent by vague and wild passages and stairs, down this convent castle, into a queer open court, in front of the church. The church, after the Byzantine order, is most splendid—blazing with gold and silver, and ornamental lamps, and covered with pictures, sacred banners, and Greek inscriptions. The founder of the convent was a native of Cappadocia, a man of great sanctity, who came to this spot of wild, weird grandeur,—so perfectly adapted to the taste of an anchorite—founded his establishment about A.D. 483, drew around him thousands of followers, and lived and ruled within these walls for half a century. Here is a chapel, in which are shown the skulls and bones of thousands of the monks of this order, who were slain by the Persian hordes. A ghastly array of skeletons are these bones of fourteen thousand martyrs. The seventy monks now here seem “jolly good fellows,” but they must have a lonely time of it, burrowing in their holes, never eating meat, and subjecting themselves to the severest austerities. No woman is allowed ever to enter the convent. No female has ever seen the inside of these walls. Miss Martineau says: “The monks are too holy to be hospitable;” but they have an outside building constructed for special emergencies, and when there is a woman in the party wishing to spend the night in the convent, she, poor creature, is forced to mount a high ladder into an upper window, when the ladder is taken away, and she is secure and secured for the night.

Passing out of the ponderous gates of the convent, we mounted our horses and rode a mile or two along the Valley of the Kedron, to our camping-place. Its deep and rocky sides are burrowed with holes and caverns, once filled with hermits, who were wout to retire from the world to fast and pray in imitation of Christ.