Dr. Macleod thus describes the beginnings of this strange monastery:

"That wonderful building, the hospice of pilgrims during many centuries, had its origin with the hermits—*tradition* says to the number of 15,000 who once sought refuge from persecution in this place of solitude and defence. The precipices are full of caves. These were enlarged, and fashioned, by the aid of walls closing up apertures and connecting jutting strata, into something like houses, or cells rather, by the anchorites. One abode communicated with another, a hundred feet below or above it, by narrow paths and tortuous holes, such as a fox might creep through with caution; and there they lived - God alone, who feeds the wild beasts of the desert, knows how!—on herbs and water, nourishing skeleton bodies with strange minds, whose ideas belong to a world of thought we know not of.

"But how can I give an idea of the convent? Well, imagine a cell scooped out between the ledges of those rocks, then several others near it, and then a cave enlarged into a chapel, and this chapel becoming the parish church of the wild glen, and being surrounded by other cells and houses built on this ledge of rock, and others below on another ledge reached by stairs, and others on storey below storey, and so down the face of the precipice, cells and chapels and houses being multiplied, until, from the ridge above to the stream below, a beehive has been formed, which is finally defended by high walls and two strong towers.

"It is a haven of repose in the wilderness to every pilgrim. It can accommodate hundreds in its endless honeycombs; and is the *beau idéal* of a monastery, such as one reads about in the tales of the Crusades and of the Middle Ages."

In the library of the old convent, Tischendorf and Curzon found about a thousand Greek manuscripts, among them eight books of the Old Testament and a copy of Homer's Iliad. About sixty monks are in residence, chiefly from Turkey and Greece, and a few Russians. Greek is the language in daily use.

In the chapel a long-haired priest was droning at the altar. I saw some very old and infirm monks on whose strength the austerities of the frequent and protracted services seemed too severe a tax. No seats are permitted in the chapel, but a number of stalls are provided with arms about shoulder high, on which the monks may rest. Others had a single crutch-shaped staff on which they leaned during prayer. It made me think of Jacob, who "worshipped leaning upon the top of his staff."

The effect by moonlight of this deep, dark gorge, with its crouching shadows, the high lights on cliff and scaur, the lambent lamps of the stars above, the twinkling tapers in the chapel, the ghostly tolling of the convent bell, and the brawling of the Kedron in the rocky bed below, are said to be weirdly impressive.

After rest and refreshment we mounted our horses and rode up this Valley of Fire between its sterile and desolate cliffs till we reached the more fertile and wider Valley of Kedron near