

meaning of the strange rites, to which he replied: "*Magnum opus!*" proceeding immediately to discourse at length to me in a comparatively unknown tongue, so that I could very imperfectly understand his explanations. I took the liberty, however, of inspecting the stones in process of preparation, and was surprised beyond measure at the strange forms into which many had been thrown. Indeed, I puzzled myself into melancholy conjecturing how they could be fitted into any wall. The whole economy of this establishment was, to say the least, very peculiar, and I had almost said unnatural, for the men were all bachelors (technically), and the women virgins; the latter, with few exceptions, being imprisoned behind strong iron gratings, while some of the former adopted the mendicant profession, and seemed to believe that by so doing they contributed largely to the erection of the King's palace. When the stones manipulated in this establishment were finished, a considerable proportion vanished in a mist which ever seemed to hang around it.

An oppressive sensation compounded of gloom and sadness at seeing so much labour misapplied and so much valuable material turned to small account so overcame me that I was glad to make my exit, and I forthwith turned my steps towards the next work-place. But between this and that already described, there was another house claiming great antiquity, and in many respects (as I was informed, for I did not visit it), carrying on its work very much like the latter. The two had indeed been in agreement at one time, but they had quarrelled about statuary and other equally vital matters, until they became totally estranged, each holding the other in sovereign contempt, and declaring each other's workmen to be mere Greek or Roman botches, as the case might be, wholly incompetent for the tasks they had undertaken.

Having no disposition to enter into their squabbles and having had a surfeit of mummery, I went on to what was called by its devoted adherents the British work-shop. It did not appear by any means so ancient a pile as either of the other two, and yet among its artisans, I heard that it was of equal age! In some respects it resembled the building I had just quitted, and, indeed, there was an affectation of cousinship between a part of the two squads of workmen. It gloried in towers, turrets, illuminated