

mortar. They have five religious services during the day, and twice in the night get up at the most unheard-of hours for prayers.

The monks have but one amusement, that of taming the wild birds and beasts of the savage gorge. A pet wolf comes at the ringing of a bell for a ration of bread dipped in oil, and every morning jackals and foxes assemble at the bottom of the gorge, 600 feet below, and the monks cast down food to the ravenous beasts. Even the shy birds will catch berries as they are thrown in the air, or feed from the hands of the monks, their wild cries the while resounding from cliff to cliff.

A few fig-trees grow on the sheltered ledges, and a solitary palm grows out of the rock, planted long centuries ago, it is alleged, by St. Saba.

It lends pathetic interest to this wild and desolate monastery to know that here were written eleven centuries ago by St. Stephen the Sabaite, the beautiful hymn number 213 in our hymn-book :

Art thou weary, art thou languid,
Art thou sore distress'd ?
"Come to me," saith One, "and coming,
Be at rest."

Even the solitude of these cells and cloisters cannot give the peace for which in every age the human heart has yearned. St. Stephen entered the monastery as a boy of ten, and here he remained for fifty-nine long years. If the good monk in the better world can know that throughout Christendom his beautiful hymn is inspiring faith and hope and bringing consolation, he may feel that his deep heart-searchings and holy aspirations amid these savage surroundings have not been in vain.

Here, too, lived St. Cosmas, who wrote 1,200 years ago the Advent hymn, "Christ is born, set forth His name;" and St. John Damascene, who, in the eighth century, forsook the comforts of his wealthy home at Damascus for the austerities of these hermit cells, and wrote the noble Easter hymn, beginning "The day of resurrection."

In the third and fourth centuries hermit life took root in Palestine, and the dismal sepulchres of the dead became the homes of the living. The cliffs of Southern Palestine, especially those in the tremendous gorges of the Kedron and the Dead Sea, fairly swarmed with hermits. We could see many of these cells, hollowed out like martins' nests in the sides of the cliffs, apparently inaccessible, some still reached by hanging galleries suspended from the rock. I noticed one marked 922. Whether they were numbered in sequence or not, I could not tell.