

One of the largest of the establishments being near, I directed my steps thither, and noticed that a very large number of stones were carried there. It was a venerable-looking pile, but withal a very peculiar one. The original plan had evidently been greatly altered, and, as it appeared to me, not at all for the better, for it had been cut up into the most fantastic shapes, while various additions had been made by means of which dark, unwholesome and fear-inspiring cells and caverns were created, the purposes of which, in connection with the ostensible objects of the main structure, utterly baffled my comprehension. The ivy and other parasites, some of a very noxious character, had climbed the walls, covered the windows and almost excluded the light from the interior. But it appeared that these parasitic plants had somehow protected the fabric, for when the masonry was exposed to the sun, it soon commenced to decay. Indeed, the strangely composite building exhibited, not signs of decay merely, but evidences of having been terribly shaken, for there were great rents and gaps in it, together with vast heaps of rubbish, indicating that a considerable portion had fallen in. But the most revolting of the features it presented was the sign of blood; for except in the very modern portions large crimson stains, which all the waters of Jordan never could purge, incarnadined the walls and floors as evidences of many a fearful and sanguinary tragedy.

The *tout-en-semble*, however, was still grand and imposing, but the dark gloom within was sorely depressing to persons loving sunlight and a well-oxygenated air. Yet there was an indescribable fascination about the tumble-down old place. The walls were covered with fine paintings and many a niche was enriched with statuary. Throughout there was the odour of incense, and at intervals, the voices of grand musical instruments, cunningly played, broke in upon the ear. At the further end lights were burning in chandeliers, though it was mid-day, while men habited in gorgeous costumes flitted about and chanted in strange monotone over their work. But there were some also wearing long dark robes and shaven crowns, while others went barefooted as well as bare-headed, and not a few had ropes around their waists.

Meeting one of these bearing a stone, I inquired into the