

literally gorged with the strangest and most surprising formations ; assuredly, in no other part of the wide world has nature accumulated in greater profusion her most marvellous works. Let us cite only the *Imperial Mantle*, an exquisite drapery of the same kind as that which we saw on leaving the Vestibule, and especially the *Grand Organ*, the most imposing and fantastic of these creations of chance. At the sight of its alabaster columns, lofty as cathedral-spires ; of those enormous *buffets* standing detached in terrific relief from the circular wall ; of that cupola enriched with white needle-like ornaments, dentelated, and foliated as if by the patient chisel of a mediæval sculptor ; you feel for a moment deprived of all sensation. When lit up by Bengal fires, each illuminating the splendid scene with a different lustre, cries of admiration are uttered by every lip.

But we now approach the legendary part of the cavern, the locality which has given name to the vast hall wherein we now find ourselves. Our principal guide neglects no opportunity of displaying it under its most magical aspect, and not unnaturally makes the skilfullest use possible of the natural *mise-en-scène*. It is truly a dramatic surprise, and one of a gigantic character. We reach a point where our advance is suddenly impeded by a precipice, which the rock embraces in a semi-circular sweep. At the request of our guide, all the torches are extinguished. Meanwhile, he glides along the wall, above the profound abyss, and places a Bengal fire upon a rocky ledge. Suddenly the flame leaps up, and falls full upon the statue of a woman, robed and crowned, rising apparently from the very depths of profundity, and outlining, on the intense black of the background, a weird and marvellous sketch of her colossal proportions. This is **THE VIRGIN**. The first impression is truly powerful, and easily accounts for the wild miraculous stories to which the singular phenomenon has given birth amongst the common people.

The *Virgin* is the last tableau in this long fantastic gallery ; but we were resolute to descend to the very bottom of the grotto. It was a tourist's weakness, but also originated in a desire to ascertain the exact height of the vault, which Marsollier, in 1782, as well as later explorers, had estimated at 325 feet.

Soon with full lungs we breathe the fresh air on the table-land of Taurat. We take leave of our brave guides, with memories full of ineffaceable impressions ; and our carriage speedily conveys us towards the charming little town of Gauges.

In the desert of the Thebaid, in Egypt, may be seen the celebrated Grottoes of Samoun, or the *Crocodiles' Grottoes*, which are entered through an irregularly shaped crevasse, on a level with the ground, and about three feet broad by ten feet deep. With their black walls encrusted in a pasty material, they contain innumerable mummies of all kinds, and especially of embalmed crocodiles. Their recesses afford a shelter for clouds of bats, which, when disturbed, dash wildly against the visitor's face.

The decomposition and modification of basaltic strata effected by