

The *Grotte des Demoiselles* or *des Fées* ("Baoumas de las Doumaïssallas") occupies the interior of the hill of Taurat, a few hundred yards distant from the village of Saint-Bauzille, and about a league from the town of Ganges. Its mouth is placed on the platform of the hill, which, crowned with leafy oaks, dominates over the valley, a sweet Arcadian valley, fenced round by mountains, and watered by a pleasant river.

A French traveller, Ernest Hamelin, published in 1861, in the "Messager du Midi," a Montpellier newspaper, his narrative of an excursion to the *Grotte des Demoiselles*. M. Figuier reproduces a portion of this interesting account of one of the natural wonders of France, which we here translate :—

Towards the northern extremity of the platform of the Taurat hill, the rock seems to have been crushed in over an area of several yards, and presents a circular excavation of considerable depth ; this is the mouth of the grotto.

An iron staircase, and, lower down, a ladder, are arranged to facilitate the access. In a few minutes we found ourselves all reassembled at the bottom of this kind of well. The tapers and torches are lighted, and bidding adieu for a few hours to the sun, we disappeared, with our guides, through a fissure which forms the entrance to the *Vestibule*.

We had scarcely advanced a few steps, before we were able to form an idea of the immense calcareous deposits accumulated in the cavern. Enormous stalactites present their white fantastic outlines ; the rocky walls seem covered with petrified snow, besprinkled here and there by crystals, transparent as blocks of ice, and irradiated with all the colours of the spectrum in the flashing splendour of our lights.

This, however, is only the prelude to far stranger marvels. We descended to the bottom of the *Vestibule*, which a door separates from the other recesses, a precaution designed against imprudent persons whom a thoughtless curiosity might induce to adventure, without guides, into the inextricable maze we were about to penetrate. We ceased to descend a few moments, and mounted upwards to gain the saloon of the *Royal Mantle*. There we were met with a fantastic but magnificent surprise : an immense drapery in stone, artistically flung over a projection of the rock, droops from an angle of the vaulted roof, and displays its folds, harmonious and wavy as velvet or satin. Nothing more astonishing and curious than this work of nature can be imagined ; some of the details are really modelled with fairy art.

Tearing ourselves from this spectacle, we descended towards the *Grand Hall*, or *Hall of the Virgin*. Hitherto our subterranean peregrination had been accomplished without much difficulty ; a few narrow fissures, some tolerably rough escarp-