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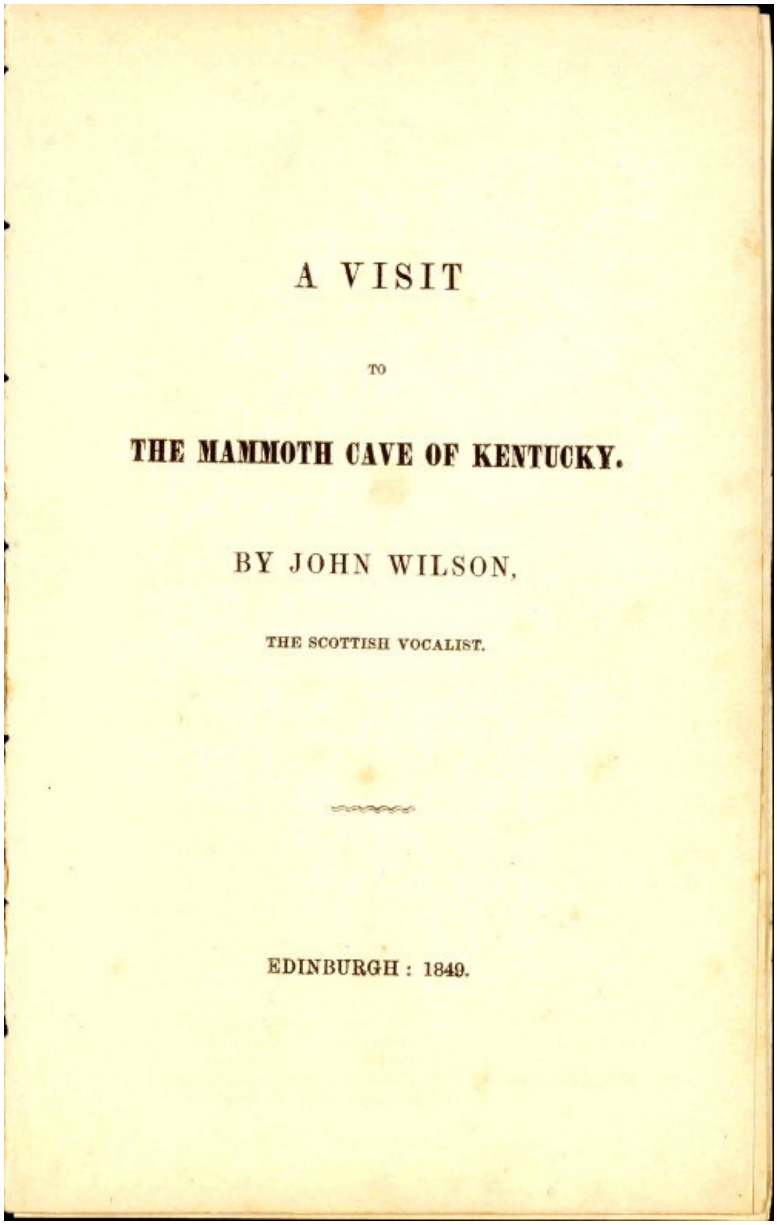

A VISIT

TO

THE MAMMOTH CAVE OF KENTUCKY.

BY JOHN WILSON,

THE SCOTTISH VOCALIST.

EDINBURGH: 1849.

A VISIT
TO
THE MAMMOTH CAVE OF KENTUCKY.

Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, May 20, 1849.

We left the City of Rooks, as Nashville is called, on Thursday morning at half-past four, and travelled ninety miles to our place of destination for the night, which occupied 19 hours. The stages in this part of the country lose a great deal of time needlessly by stopping for meals a great deal oftener than people require them. During our ride we had breakfast at 21 miles from Nashville, at a place called Tyree Springs, and that was acceptable enough; but before it was well digested we had to stop for dinner, and then again for supper, in three hours more; and as the people in this last hotel, which was at a pretty little town called Bowling Green, did not wish to be at the trouble of making one supper for their own boarders and another for the coach travellers, we were compelled to "bide their time" though not any of us wanted supper at all, and here we lost an hour and a half. In our journey we were interested in the day time by the great variety of wild flowers we saw, and after dark by the crowds of fire-flies in the air, in the trees, in the fields. We reached Bell's,[1] where we were to stay for the night, at half-past 11, where we might have had another meal, but we did not like. Bell, a civil old fellow, is famed for making a kind of Atholl brose, of old peach brandy and honey, which we had a tasting of, and then went to bed; but Mr Bell's brose I shall never taste again, for although it is pleasant enough to taste, yet I could not get the disagreeable flavour of the peach brandy out of my mouth the whole of the next day. After a capital breakfast, Bell sent us in a four horse stage to the Mammoth Cave, a distance of eight miles, over one of the roughest roads I ever encountered; but what we have seen in this wonderful place amply compensates for any trouble or difficulty we may have undergone. I am really quite at a loss how to begin to give you the least idea of the place, for it is almost beyond description; at all events I feel quite sure that any kind of description given in writing, by any mortal man, cannot afford to a stranger the smallest notion of the wondrousness, the sublimity, the awfulness of this cave—this stupendous work of Nature. First let me tell you, however, that it contains 226 avenues; at least that number has been discovered, for there are more than that; forty-seven domes, eight cataracts, pits innumerable, and eight rivers, only three of which have been explored. It was first discovered by the whites in 1802, and during the last war with England immense quantities of saltpetre were made in it, the remains of the utensils for the manufacture of which are still to be seen at a short distance from the entrance, and even the marks of the hoofs of the oxen the miners used can be traced in the ground. It is only about ten years since the curious began to visit the cave, and every year the visitors increase in number, and they must continue to do so as the wonders of the place become more talked of. About the end of June is the time for crowds coming, and there is ample accommodation for more than two hundred people in a very comfortable hotel, with an obliging and intelligent host, named Mosher. There is no other visitor here at present but ourselves. Having given you so much preliminary, I shall endeavour to give you an inkling of what we saw during our

FIRST DAY'S VISIT TO THE MAMMOTH CAVE.

The necessary alterations having been made in the costume of my two daughters, namely, the petticoats being shortened, and trousers being donned—pants, I ought to have said, for trousers are never named here, and breeches are never made—and caps being placed upon their craniums, a gentleman, who accompanied us from Nashville, and myself, having been provided with coats that had been coats once, and low-crowned soft hats, we set off for the cave. We were fortunate in getting the services of the favourite guide Stephen, to whom we had a letter from a lady in Nashville. He is an active, intelligent, attentive, capital fellow, and after walking some 200 yards through an avenue of shady trees, we found him near the entrance, with his lamps ready to light, his flask of oil on his back, and one basket of provisions. We descended by about thirty rude steps to the entrance, where our lamps being lighted, we bade farewell for a while to the light of day. In a very short time we come to a wall that had been built by the miners, and in which there is a door-way, inside of which we are fairly in the cave. The temperature of the cave is always at sixty, and when the temperature out of doors is higher, the air rushes out at this doorway, so as to blow out the lamps, if the command of the guide is not obeyed to keep your lamps before you. At first one cannot see very well—the eyes are not yet accustomed to penetrate the darkness—the lamps only tended to make the darkness more visible. By and by we get more used to it. The "Church," as it is

called, is the first apartment where we make a halt. It is very large, with galleries round it, and a projection of rock at one side, called the pulpit. Being told by the guide to put our lights behind us, he set fire to a Bengal light, and then we were struck with wonder and awe at the splendour and the vastness of the rocky apartment. For size, Exeter Hall is nothing to it. During the season service is performed in it by some of the clergymen visitors, and the effect must be very sublime, to see each worshipper sitting with his lamp, listening to the Word, joining in prayer to the Lord of all, and singing his praises. Each person enters with his lamp, of course, but on coming to the church the lamps are all placed together, so as to make one general grand light. The church is in the "Main Cave," which is five miles in extent, and as we move along we see the marks of the action of the water upon the rocks in every part. The average height is 50 feet, its width 100 feet; at one place, however, it is 340 feet wide. We leave the Main Cave, and enter the "Gothic Avenue," where the first apartment we come to is called the "Haunted Chamber," from two mummies having been found there by the miners in 1809. They were in a sitting position, and clothed with deer-skins. One of them is now in a museum in New York; the other was burned by the museum in Cincinnati taking fire. The friend who was with me being somewhat of a utility sort of a person, wishes everything to be made proper use of, and suggested that the cave would be a capital place for keeping meat, vegetables, &c., when he was told by Stephen, much to his satisfaction, that the hotel people used it for that purpose. We go along farther, and soon find ourselves in the "Register Room," which has, or rather had, a beautiful white ceiling, but it is now considerably defaced by many persons wishing to immortalise themselves by writing their names on the roof with the smoke of a candle. They must have had the candle attached to a pretty long pole, for the roof is high. I. B. of old England is one of the names; I suppose John Bull is meant. There is also a Mr John Smith—it does not state where his locale is, but it is not unlikely that it was Mr Smith of the United States. After passing "Vulcan's Forge," so called from the stone resembling very much the refuse of a forge, we come to the "Gothic Chapel." Before entering it, however, Stephen takes our lamps, and leaves us in the dark for a time, while he goes and places them on the stalactite pillar in the chapel. He calls out to us to "come on— 6
there's nothing to stumble over," and we advanced towards the chapel. How splendid! how beautiful! The stalactite pillars are all opposite to each other, as if they were really supporting the roof. It reminded me of the crypt under the Cathedral at Rochester, in Kent, excepting that here the pillars were translucent. About ten or twelve feet high are the pillars, and the stalactite formations are still going on in some of them. It has been ascertained, it seems, that it takes thirty years to form the thickness of a wafer, then how many times thirty years must it have taken to form these pillars! It was a solemn scene, the stillness was indeed quite awful. I broke the silence by singing Luther's Hymn, while those around me stood like statues. We came next to what is called "Napoleon's Breastwork," an immense block of limestone, that has evidently fallen away from the roof at some time or other, and now lies in a slanting form. It is about 60 feet long, 20 feet to the top, and looks over into a deep ravine. Now we come to his Satanic Majesty's "Armchair," which is the name given to a splendid stalactite column in the centre of a chamber, and which on one side forms an excellent seat. The back is round, and like one of the old fashioned chairs stuffed, and covered with silk. You may have an idea of the size of it when I tell you that it takes three men's arms to go round it. Not far from it is another stalactite formation called the "Elephant's Head," from its exact resemblance to one—the eyes, ears, and trunk, are perfect—some barbarian, however, has defaced the trunk. Now we approach the "Lover's Leap," where any hapless swain may have an opportunity of getting rid of all his earthly cares by taking a dismal leap of 50 feet, but no one has yet been desperate enough to do it. We descend to the left of the "Lover's Leap" and presently enter an extraordinary passage in the rock, called the "Devil's Elbow;" it is about three feet wide and twelve high, and leads to the lower branch of the Gothic Avenue. The stone of the passage bears evidence of water having rushed through it with tremendous force, though how long ago it is impossible to ascertain. One of the guides got a terrible fright here some time since, by a gentleman who was gifted with ventriloquial powers. He had arrived at the hotel in the evening, and requested a guide to accompany him to the cave. While they were standing over the "Lover's Leap" he made a cry for "lights and some water," which seemed to come through the "Devil's Elbow" from the apartment below. The guide, fancying it was some one of his companions whose lamp had gone out, called out to him to stay where he was and he would come to him immediately; as he was descending by the Devil's Elbow the voice came from another part in front of them. He returned, and was ascending again to the Lover's Leap, when the voice once more came 7
through the Elbow, at which he became considerably alarmed, and it was with great difficulty the gentleman could prevent him from running fairly off out of the cave, and leaving him in the lurch, which perhaps he deserved. On their return to the hotel the guide told the landlord a woful story, in the midst of which, however, he was stopped by some one coming in to say there was a maniac about the grounds, when they went out and heard a voice calling out for some tea and bread and butter. "That's it!" he said, "that's the same voice that was in the cave." The ventriloquist made the landlord aware of the trick, and the mysterious affair ended with a hearty laugh at the poor alarmed guide's expense. As we enter this part of the Gothic Avenue, we come to a basin of beautiful clear water, called the "Cooling Tub." It is about six feet wide, and a stream of the purest water is falling constantly into it from the ceiling, which is here about thirty feet high. In various parts of the cave there are streams of this description, and the sound of this falling water is the only thing that breaks the awful stillness that constantly reigns. After passing "Napoleon's Dome," which is about sixty feet in height, we come to another little pool, called "Lake Purity," the water in which is delicious to drink, so pure that no disturbance can thicken it. Now we retrace our steps to the "Main Cave," where at almost every step we take some new wonder is opened up to us. We are in an apartment called the "Ball Room," for it is frequently used as such by the visitors during the season. The floor is smooth and level, and continues so for several hundred feet, so that there is plenty of room for a large party. There are spacious galleries above, too, formed by the ledging rocks; and there is an orchestra, capable of holding twice the number of the Philharmonic Band. As we go along gazing in wonder at everything, the eye suddenly rests on a nice little niche in the wall, just like the niche that is at the door of a Roman Catholic Cathedral for holding the holy water. It has been formed by the trickling down of the water, and is called Wandering Willie's Spring; as I have considerable regard for all Wandering Willies, I partook of the water of his spring, and can vouch for its purity and refreshing qualities. The "Standing Rocks" that we by and by approach, are immense blocks of stone that have evidently fallen from the roof, some of them twenty feet long, and six or eight feet thick, and many of them even larger, and what is something remarkable, it is the thinnest part of the stone that has sunk into the earth. The next very prominent object we come to is the "Giant's Coffin," an immense block of limestone that has evidently fallen away from the side, and which perfectly resembles a coffin, but may well be called a giant's, for it is sixty feet long and about twenty feet thick. It has the curved lid which I have

observed in the fashionable coffins in the south, and which I heard an auctioneer, who was selling some by auction, recommend as being much more accommodating than the plain lids, for the person could turn round whenever he felt inclined to do so. At some distance beyond this, perhaps 150 yards, the cave takes a gigantic turn, called the “Acute Angle,” or “Great Bend,” which the guide illumines by one of his Bengal lights, and displays to the astonished spectator one of the most wonderful sights that ever mortal eyes beheld. It has the appearance of a vast amphitheatre. It must be about seventy feet high. In front of us is the great cornerstone or bend, and on each side the avenue looms away into unfathomable darkness. The Bengal light dies, and we trudge along to the right, with our lamps in our hands, single file, with Stephen at the head, and ere long he says, “Stop, we are now in the ‘Star-Chamber.’” Wonders will never cease, for here is something more wonderful than anything we have yet seen. How can I convey to you an idea of it? Let me see. It is as if we were at the bottom of a deep ravine or pass, about sixty feet wide, and one hundred feet high, the top of the ravine being terminated by jutting-out rocks, and above those projecting rocks we see the blue firmament of heaven, as it were, with the stars shining above us. The rocks at the top are white in many places, and cloud-like, which shows the starry firmament to greater advantage. The stars are formed by the sparkling gypsum in the dark limestone, and a more complete optical illusion dame Nature never called into existence. We felt as if we should never tire gazing on this, and expatiating to each other upon its wonders. Stephen asked us how we should like to have all the lights extinguished, to try the effect of it in that way, which we readily agreed to; but not a particle of anything could we see. There was, of course, not the smallest ray of light—there could not be, for we were two miles from the mouth of the cave, and 170 feet below the surface of the earth. I put my finger close to my eye but could see nothing. When no one spoke the silence was awful. I don’t know what the others were thinking of in the midst of this total eclipse, but I could not help thinking, now, if Stephen should have forgot his matches we shall be in a fine *fix*. I spoke to him of this afterwards, when he said he should soon have got lights for us if he had forgot his matches, for he knows the cave so well, having been a guide in it for thirteen years, that he could have forced his way to the mouth. This Star-Chamber is one of the most pleasing sights in the cave. Not far from it are the remains of some small houses that were built some years ago for consumptive patients. The air is so pure and the temperature so equal, that they enjoyed very good health while they remained in the cave, but as soon as they went above ground they became as bad as ever; the idea, therefore, of making the cave an hospital for consumption has been abandoned. I forgot to say that while we were admiring the wonder of the Starry Chamber we sang a sacred trio, the effect of which was beautiful, for everything was so still—no interruption by whisperers, or those persons who are not aware that it is the height of rudeness to speak while any one is singing—the voices sounded large and full. The sublimity of the scene could not altogether withdraw the attention of our utility friend from the things of this earth, for while we were gazing in astonishment on the scene around us, he asked me whether, as I came from London, I had ever seen a work on the art of brewing by fermentation, and without yeast! The Star-Chamber was the extent of our walk in the Main Cave to-day. We returned as far as the Giant’s Coffin, behind which we entered an avenue, and descended some 12 or 14 steps, then through a very low and narrow passage into the “Deserted Chambers,” which we got to by crawling some part of the way on our hands and knees. The first of the Deserted Chambers is called the Wooden Bowl, from the fact of a wooden bowl having been found in it by the miners some years ago. At a short distance from this bowl we stopped to dine, sitting on the edge of a large flat rock, which we used as a dining-table. Close by there was a spring of clear delicious water. We enjoyed our repast amazingly; drank, in the pure, unadulterated water, to all our friends round St Paul’s; had some songs after dinner, then resumed our walk. Our attention was first directed to the “Sidesaddle Pit,” which is about 60 feet deep; and to prevent one’s having a chance of falling into it, it is railed round by spars of sassafras tree, on one of which are two sprouts, which made their appearance about a month ago, and are looked upon with interest, for there is no other sign of vegetation within the place. The ceiling here, from water oozing through the stone, is just like honeycomb. A little further on we come to the “Bottomless Pit,” a frightful chasm with a fragile wooden bridge across it. A piece of lighted paper thrown from the bridge into the pit, shows us the depth of it, which, from the water to the top of the dome above us, is 280 feet. As we found that the splendid dome over head had no name, we called it St Paul’s, and insisted that Stephen should henceforth call it by that name, and no other.

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As we go along we see on the roof of the avenue the most beautiful stalactite formations—rosettes, &c., in innumerable variety; there is indeed here a mixture of the sublime and beautiful. We come to the “Wild Hall,” well named from its appearance, go through the “Arch,” which is one of the most-beautifully formed natural arches that can be seen, return through what is called the Labyrinth, and go to “Gorin’s Dome.” Much as we had seen to astonish us, we were not prepared for the magnificence of the scene we were now to witness. Stephen placed us at an aperture about the ordinary size of a window, told us to lay down our lamps behind us, then he left us. By and by we discovered him on a point a considerable way above us, and he lighted one of his Bengals and unfolded the wonders of the dome to us. It is nearly 300 feet in height, and we were standing about half way up. The sides of the dome are fluted, and have the appearance of having been polished, for the water is still trickling down. It is utterly impossible to give any idea of the splendour of this place when lighted up. We had not seen half enough of it. We called for another Bengal light, but Stephen had not one more left, so we were obliged to leave, which we did, expressing our determination to visit the dome again in our next ramble.

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We had now been five hours in the cave, and as we had more than two miles to walk to the mouth, we set off on our homeward route, and passed again some of our old acquaintances, the Giant’s Coffin, the Church, walked a little way down “Audribow’s Avenue,” and finally we saw the light of day glimmering before us, and as we drew nearer to the mouth I thought the sun never shone so beautifully before, and that the green grass and the foliage of the trees, in fact the whole face of nature, was more lovely than ever. When fairly out of the cave we felt as if hot air was being blown upon us, so oppressively warm did the atmosphere feel. And so finished our first day in the Mammoth Cave. We returned to the hotel, spent the evening in thinking over and talking of the wonders we had seen, then went to bed pretty early, to prepare ourselves for being up betimes to start upon our second day’s ramble.

SECOND DAY’S RAMBLE.

To-day there were three grand points of the cave which we hoped to visit, namely, the Chief City or Temple, the Mammoth Dome, and the Fairy Grotto. We entered about seven o'clock, after a capital breakfast at the hotel, and passed over a good deal of the ground we visited yesterday. We left Audribow's Avenue on our left, came to the Church again, which we could not help taking another look at, went on through the Main Cave, passing the Giant's Coffin, coming to the Great Bend, then entering again the Star Chamber, through which we passed, and came to the Salts Room; here there are layers of salts in the sides of the chamber, and from the roof they hang in crystals. They taste very pure, and not at all unpleasant, and are used medicinally by the people in the neighbourhood of the cave, when they can coax any of the guides to bring them a supply. By kindling a fire in this apartment, or putting all the lamps together so as to create a tolerable heat, the salt comes down in flakes like a fall of fleecy snow. As we trudge along the Main Cave (so called because all the other avenues branch off from it), the mind cannot but be filled with awe while contemplating the wonders of this immense tunnel. It is as if we were walking through the bed of a river, and the ceiling, generally about sixty feet high, looks something like a cloudy sky; indeed, one part of it is called the Floating Clouds. Soon, however, our ceiling becomes very low, and our road very rough; we are compelled to crawl a considerable way on our hands and knees, and are not at all displeased when we reach the Banquet Hall, for here there is plenty of room to stand up, the ceiling being 40 feet high, and the width of the apartment about 700 feet. We were very glad to sit down too, and Stephen went to a distance and lighted one of his Bengal lights, which showed us the glories of this immense apartment. While we were resting here Stephen sang some negro songs very well—a merry fellow is Stephen, and has a good voice. One of his ditties pleased us very much—it was about uncle Ned, an old nigger, who died long ago, and who had no wool on de top ob his head, de place where de wool ought to grow. I sang my poor friend Rooke's song of "My Boyhood's Home," from Amilie, and then we resumed our journey, passing by two cataracts, each of which falls about 50 feet. Our road was very difficult, indeed, and exceedingly toilsome, notwithstanding the fact that one can undergo a great deal more fatigue in the cave than it is possible to do in the open air; but when we reached the point at which we were aiming, our toils were amply repaid by the magnificence of the Chief City, or Temple. This dome is 120 feet high, the roof being of smooth solid rock; it is 300 feet across, and 960 feet in length. In the middle of it is a large heap of stones called the Mountain, up which we clambered to see this immense area of darkness illuminated. It is impossible to conceive anything more sublime than this rocky hall when lighted up by the Bengal; and it is as impossible for words to convey to one who has never seen it the least idea of its magnificence. But the light went out too soon. "Another Bengal! another Bengal! Stephen!" was the cry that immediately burst from every one. "Ah!" said Stephen, "I knew that would be the case." He then formed a light not quite so brilliant as the Bengal, but which lasted longer, and in whose softness there was more awe in contemplating this vast place. We remained here a long time, sometimes in dismal silence, and sometimes breathing forth a sacred song, or one of a serious character, for one of any other description would have been quite out of place. Moore's "Oft in the stilly night" I sang very softly, but it sounded immensely in the silence; and, if I may judge of the effect of it upon Stephen, it was very solemn, for he said it made him cry. He sang us no more nigger songs till we were fairly out of the Temple. We turned our steps now towards the Fairy Grotto, the way to which is also very difficult—a great deal of crawling again under low ceilings, but which is generally got over very good-humouredly, each one's mishaps causing a hearty laugh to the others. When you reach the apartment you discover that it is not inaptly named the Fairy Grotto, and are soon rapt in admiration of the beautiful stalactites before you. The lamps are placed in the pillars and other parts of the grotto, in the same way as at the Gothic Chapel, and the effect is very fine. The stalactites were once whiter than they are now, for the smoke of the lamps has darkened them not a little. While admiring the endless variety of stalactite beauties before us, one cannot help feeling sorry that visitors should be so barbarous as to break them off, for they but rarely can get a rosette or anything else whole; they therefore spoil the beauty of the grotto, without being able to carry away a satisfactory trophy of their destructive deeds. The stalactite formations are still going on in the grotto, for the water is constantly oozing through, and many a crystal drop may be seen hanging from the end of the bunch of beauties already formed. There are some thick massy pillars, some stalactites and stalagmites not yet met—the stalagmite is the formation on the ground caused by the dropping of the water from the stalactite, which hangs as it were from the roof; many of them are beautifully and fantastically shaped, and the effect of the light shining through them is rich in the extreme. After feasting our eyes on this splendid scene, we left the Solitary Cave, and entered again the Main Cave, and when we got as far as the Giant's Coffin, we once more dived down behind it into the Deserted Chambers, and passing through the Wooden Bowl, we regained our dining-hall of yesterday, and finding ourselves quite ready for a repast, we again dined here, and drank of the clear delicious spring, and after a long rest and chat, and some music, we set out on our further travels. We soon came to the Bottomless Pit, and our new-named St Paul's Dome, and passing on entered the Valley of Humility, so called from the visitor being obliged to stoop very much while walking through it, for it is only about four feet high; a short avenue takes us to the Winding Way, otherwise called the Fat Man's Misery, a most extraordinary freak of nature. It is 109 yards long, and about 15 inches broad, and of solid rock. It widens about three feet from the ground, so that one has play for his arms; but it keeps constantly winding, there being not more than two or three feet straight at a stretch, and must perplex very much any tolerably stout person who finds himself winding through it. Although it is called the Fat Man's Misery, yet it has sometimes proved the fat woman's misery too, for a very stout lady, if there is such a thing in the world, got into it once, and stuck fairly. The appendix, to her quite unnecessary, of a bustle, was squeezed out of existence; and in winding her way, she nearly winded herself; she breathed fast, but stuck faster; she, being so great, became greatly alarmed, and her friends were compelled to haul her through till they got into Great Relief, which the avenue at the end of the Winding Way is very appropriately called, and which she frankly confessed was the greatest relief to her that she had ever in her life experienced. In the avenue of Great Relief we saw the point to which the river rose in January last, which is fifty-six feet above its usual level. In going along we come to two routes, one of which leads to the river, where we intend going to-morrow, and another to the Mammoth Dome, whither we now steer our course. We come first, however, to the Bacon Chamber, another curious freak of dame Nature; the ceiling is low, and has the appearance of being hung with canvass covered bacon hams and shoulders, so curiously has the action of the water formed these stones. There is another curious formation in this chamber. In a part of the ceiling there is the appearance of a stratum having dropped out for about 20 feet, about one foot broad, and the same in height, and the vacuum is in the form of a serpent. Our next place to gaze at is the Bandit's Hall, a wonderfully wild looking apartment of great magnitude, the floor being covered with rocks of various sizes, that have evidently fallen from the ceiling. It

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was like being among some wild rocky mountains, with the sky far above us, and when lighted up was a magnificent spectacle of wild rugged scenery. Now for the Mammoth Dome. We sincerely hope it may be something worth looking at when we get to it, for our way is the most difficult, tedious, and toilsome that we have yet encountered; by this time, however, we were getting quite expert at creeping, and going sometimes in crab fashion, sidewise on our hands and feet. At last we emerge out of a hole, and find ourselves standing on the brink of a precipice, and hear the falling of water from a great height, and by the dim glimmer of our lights we see that there is something before us awfully grand and stupendous, and this is the Mammoth Dome! But we do not see it yet as we shall see it; we must descend 20 feet by a crazy-looking ladder, on which human foot has not been since last summer, in order that we may see the dome in all its glory. Well, we are down, and not a very easy task it is to get down; and we are standing there enjoying a kind of shower bath, while Stephen goes upon a height to light up—and when he does light up we forget the water that is showering down upon us—we forget everything but the grand scene before us. We look on the vast space lighted up, and we see the sides of this immense dome, or tower it might be called, for it is nearly four hundred feet high, fluted, polished, here pillars, there capitals of the most elaborate description, as if the cunningest hand of the cunningest craftsman had been there—ay, and has he not been there? It is something like Gorin's Dome, which we saw yesterday, but much larger. It may well be called the greatest wonder of this wondrous place. Stephen must give us another Bengal. Again we gaze in astonishment at this unparalleled wonder, and see beauties we did not see before. The light fades and dies, and again deep impenetrable gloom holds its sway. We ascend the ladder to our old ledge of rock at the mouth of the hole by which we must return, and feel thankful when we find ourselves safely at the top of it, take one last look at the dome, and then retrace our steps. When this dome was discovered in 1842, a lamp was found at the bottom of it, which puzzled the finders not a little as to how it could have got there. Inquiry was made of an old man who lives near the cave, and who worked in it when a boy at the saltpetre factories, and he remembers of a man being let down by a rope to look for saltpetre, and that he dropped his lamp. What a situation to be in! Dangling at the end of a rope in the dark, with perhaps a vacuum of 300 feet below him! We now set off for the mouth of the cave, and had to go over the same rough ground we traversed before. Having been nine hours under ground to-day, and some of our party being heartily tired, we were very glad to see the light of heaven again.

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THIRD DAY'S RAMBLE.

Although we had a day's rest yesterday, it being Sunday, my eldest daughter was not sufficiently recovered from the fatigues of Saturday to encounter another day's journeying in the cave, which might perhaps be more fatiguing than any we had yet undergone, and so my youngest and myself sallied forth, both of us being very anxious to see the ferlies across the river. It has been doubtful for some days whether we should be able to cross the river, for, like all the rivers for a considerable time past, it has been so high that there has not been sufficient room for a boat to pass between the river and the rocky ceiling above. However, Green River, which flows at about half a mile's distance from the mouth of the cave, has fallen considerably since last night, which affords some hope that the river in the cave may also have fallen, and Stephen assures us that he will get us to the other side some way or other, if we should go through Purgatory, which he suspects we shall have to do. We take an additional guide with us, named Alfred, in case his services may be required. We trudge along the Main (and at a pretty smart pace), till we reach the Giant's Coffin, behind which we again descend, and go through the Deserted Chambers, pass the Bottomless Pit and again get into the Winding Way, through which having winded, we leave the Bacon Chamber on the right, and take the passage to the left, which leads to the Dead Sea, which may be seen by looking over a precipice, and sending a blazing piece of paper to the regions below. At eighty feet distance it reaches the still water of the Dead Sea. We journey on through avenues till we reach the River Styx, which we cross in a boat, then we walk a little farther till we get to Lethe. We sail along it in our frail bark till the water becomes so shallow that we can go no farther. Echo River is the great one we have to cross, and as the guides are uncertain about the state of it, they leave us till they ascertain by what means we are to get to the other side. It was no very delightful situation for solitary helpless individuals to be left alone in a boat in the middle of a river so far under the face of the earth, and with no sound of anything near us save the trickling of invisible waterfalls, and nothing with any sign of life but gnats that fluttered about our lamps, and now and then a large cricket with immense long legs, but there was no "hearth" for it to be on, nor did it chirp. In this river are the eyeless fish; there are two kinds of them, neither having the least resemblance of a place for an eye, for, of course, they have no need of eyes. The solitariness of such a scene can scarcely be conceived. However, we must not think of it; we sang and chatted. The echo was magnificent, and sounding chords afforded us some amusement. The four notes of the chord, sounded by one voice, continued to sound altogether for a very long time, and at length died away by almost inaudible sounds. After being in this lonely situation for an hour, we were cheered by hearing the voices of the guides, singing at a long distance from us. As they came nearer we discovered that it was "Auld lang syne" they were singing, and I am sure I never heard that favourite air with greater pleasure or satisfaction. At length the glimmer of the lamps is seen in the distant darkness, and the guides approach us, awakening the echoes with "Oh, Susanna," "Old Uncle Ned," and other negro ditties. We learn that we cannot embark at the usual place, but must go round by Purgatory Avenue. They have to carry us through the shallow water about fifty yards, till we come to walking ground, then we reach a ferry which we cross in a boat, and Alfred takes the boat through the archway at the usual place for embarking, to meet us at the end of the avenue; for we hear the water splashing against the ceiling, and we cannot go that way. He must lie down flat in the boat, and get through as he best can. We reach the point of the river where he had come to, and there is no sign of him. We wait patiently for a time, and at length the awful silence is broken by the sounds of his voice, singing to let us know he has got through in safety. The effect of the solitary lamp on the water is astounding. We now all embark, and sing our way down the Echo River for about a quarter of a mile, when we get out, and walk again for some distance, then cross the river again, on Stephen's back, and at last we are fairly on the other side. The river was discovered in 1839, and first crossed in 1841. As we go along, although we are fifty or sixty feet above the river, marks of its recent rise are visible, for the sand is very wet, and our road very slippery. The avenue in which we now are must have been filled with water to the very ceiling, and our path is an awfully wild one, strewed with immense rocks that have fallen from above, and the ceiling is like a dark midnight sky. The

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walls are beautifully ornamented with rosettes, &c., of stalactite in great profusion. We are now in Lillyman's Avenue, and have come to a bend, something like the Great Bend on the other side of the river. This bend resembles exactly the stern of a large ship, and we see it as if we were in the water looking up at it. It is called the Great Western. The avenue, which is two miles long, is terminated by an apartment called Ole Bull's Concert Room, for here the great violinist discoursed eloquent music to a large party whom he accompanied into the cave some years ago. We now enter the Pass of El Ghor, which is two miles long, very narrow, that is, it averages a breadth of six or eight feet, and a height of about fifteen or eighteen. There is a singular-looking place in it called The Hanging Rocks, which are immense blocks of stone rent from the roof, and hanging as it were in air, ready to annihilate any half-hundred people that may venture under them, but fortunately they don't. We leave the Pass, and enter Spring-side, when we ascend a ladder about fifteen feet into a place called Mary's Vineyard, one of the most extraordinary freaks in the whole cave. It looks as if all the dark coloured grapes had been collected from half the vineyards on the Rhine and deposited here. The clusters are perfect, and the formations are still going on. It was lighted up with a Bengal, and the effect of it is indescribable. We pass on to Washington Hall, or the Spar Chamber, as it is sometimes called, a large and beautiful apartment, where the walls and roof are covered with beautiful ornaments, and by and by we reach the Snow-ball Room, which has the appearance of there having been a formidable battery of snow-balls directed against the roof, many of which are beautifully formed, like large white roses. We proceed to Cleveland's Cabinet, which is about two miles in length, and filled with stalactite beauties, various parts of it being distinguished by particular names, such as Mary's Bower, a beautiful part—St Cecilia's Grotto, Charlotte's Grotto, Mary Reedie's Festoon, &c., the walls of the whole for several miles being covered with rosettes, Prince of Wales' feathers, tulips, lilies, &c., and often we see a piece like a richly carved Corinthian capital. We must not forget the Diamond Grotto, where, by holding your lamp behind you, a never-ending profusion of sparkling diamonds is seen among the stalactite beauties. Many beautiful specimens 17
have fallen on the ground, and many have been knocked from the place where Nature deposited them by the ruthless hand of some visitor. We brought away some specimens with us, but they are very brittle and very heavy, which makes it difficult to procure many. It is said there are rats in this part of the cave, though it is difficult to imagine what they can support themselves and their families upon, for they cannot exist on the beautiful ornaments by which they are surrounded any more than the California miner can live on the gold he finds; but sometimes they get a chance for food. It is not long since two young men came from New York with the determination of exploring the cave. They took provisions with them to last for three days, and had Stephen for their guide. They had their blankets with them, and after one day's exploration, they fixed on Cleveland's Cabinet for their sleeping chamber. When they got up in the morning, and went for their basket to breakfast before setting out on their travels, they found every particle of food gone, and they had a trudge of eight miles to the mouth of the cave for a breakfast. The rats are different from the usual species, they leap something like a rabbit, and are very seldom seen. Beyond Cleveland's Avenue, we came to the Rocky Mountains, an exceedingly difficult place to travel over, then get to the Dismal Hall, a gloomy-looking place, about 100 feet high—Sereno's Arbour, well worthy to be visited, and Medora's Spring, are at the farthest extent of the explored part of the cave, and here we are nine miles from the mouth. We now returned, and saw on our way the Snow-ball Chamber lighted up with a Bengal, which, if possible, increased its beauty. We stopped to dine at a little spring not far from the foot of the ladder by which we descended from Mary's Vineyard, and, after resting for a time, we entered once more the Pass of El Ghor, and continued our way looking with regret for the last time upon the many wonders we had already explored. As we approached the river we found the walking as bad as ever, but we got over safe. As Alfred was carrying me along the Styx on his back, he stepped upon a quicksand, and sank considerably, which I not liking, and being quite ignorant as to where he was likely to sink to, I jumped from his back, in spite of Stephen's shouts to "hold on to him! hold on to him!" It afforded me a hearty laugh, for the water scarcely came to my knees, and the exertion of clambering over rocks, and walking along on the rough road, soon made all dry. Once on this side the river, we trudged on nimbly through the Fat Man's Misery and the Valley of Humility, and getting into the Main Cave from behind the Giant's Coffin again, we were not long in seeing the light of day. I nearly forgot to mention, that as we were sailing up the Echo River on our way home, Alfred, the guide, caught two 18
of the eyeless fish. They are small, about a finger's length, one of them like a minnow, and the other something like a shrimp. There is not the slightest appearance of eyes about them. We heard also the sound of a voice at some distance, which Stephen knew to be that of one of the guides, and when we got up on the walk about fifty feet above the river, we saw at a great distance three individuals standing beside the river, their lamps beside them. The effect was awfully sepulchral—they looked like beings of the nether regions. By the by, the place through which we traversed to the spot where we saw them, is called the Infernal Regions. The visitors soon joined us, and we left the cave together. They had only gone to the bank of the river. It will be long ere we forget our visit to the Mammoth Cave. The season not commencing till about the end of June, we had it all to ourselves, and enjoyed it much; but even when there is a crowd of people there, it must add to the amusement to meet parties as one rambles through the cave, though one would scarcely get into such a place for amusement. It fills the mind with thoughts something deeper than amusement. No accident of a serious nature has ever happened in the cave, for the guides are very careful, and every precaution is taken to prevent accidents. Very soon after the river was discovered two young gentlemen, accompanied by two young ladies, went to cross it. They were full of spirits and too full of fun, for despite the guide's warning that the boat was very crazy, they, in getting into it, upset it. Their lamps were all extinguished, and their matches lost. Fortunately the guide got them out of the water, and placed them on some rocks, where they were obliged to remain for several hours, till the people in the hotel sent to see what detained them so long in the cave. They were in a terrible fright, and no wonder. Another gentleman who had left his party, in his ardour to examine some particular point, lost his way in attempting to rejoin them, and wandered about shouting till his lamp went out, when he sat down, and he was thirty hours alone before they found him. There is no danger if the parties keep together and with the guide, but to attempt to find the way oneself were a useless task.[2] We left the Mammoth Cave Hotel at six in the evening, and had a 19
pleasant ride to Bell's, at eight miles distance. The road is through the woods and very rough, but will be smoother by and by, when there is more traffic on it. Mr Bell has improved it very much this spring, at his own expense, for he has the conveying of all the visitors from the house to the cave, and very reasonably he does it. As I before mentioned, he is an obliging and attentive old man, Mr Bell, and if you get into his good graces, he will not be sparing of his peach brandy and honey, though he very wisely takes none of it himself; and perhaps he may take you into the garden, where he will show you something that will strike you as being very singular, if you are

an Englishman. In a corner of the garden, under a quiet tree, you will see a neat tombstone, which will tell you that there the old man's son lies, and two of that son's children, and perhaps he may tell you himself that he is conducting the house and farm for the benefit of that son's widow and surviving child, whom he wishes to see comfortably provided for before he be laid in the quiet corner beside his son. After spending five hours at Bell's we got the stage for Louisville, ninety miles distant, over a road that is not of the best, and to make it worse there is a storm brewing, the lightning is flashing, the thunder is roaring, the rain is coming down in torrents, and the fire flies are whirling in the air in myriads.

P.S.—This description of the Mammoth Cave, if it may be called so, was written to a private friend, and not intended for public perusal—therefore, gentle reader, be not disappointed at not having discovered finely rounded periods, or any attempt at high-flown language—be contented with a plain chat about one of the greatest wonders of the world, and if you can manage to come across the Atlantic to see it, do so—you will not then be disappointed, I promise you, however imperfect may be my description.

SCOTIA'S DIRGE:

BEING

VERSES ON THE DEATH OF JOHN WILSON, Esq.,
THE SCOTTISH VOCALIST,
Who died at Quebec on the 9th July 1849.

Auld Scotia now may sigh aloud,
  Her tears in torrents fa',
Her sweetest harp now hangs unstrung,
  Since Wilson's ta'en awa'.
He sang o' a' her warlike deeds,
  An' sons that gallant were—
Her hoary towers, an' snaw-clad hills,
  An' maidens sweet and fair.

His was a harp o' thrillin' sound,
  Could pleasure aye impart;
Its melody o' bygane days
  Gaed hame to ilka heart.
Its strains could bring remembrance back
  To youthfu' days at school;
Or mak' us sigh for Scotia's wrangs,
  An' Flodden's day o' dool.

He sang o' beauty's winsome wiles,
  In mony a leesome theme,
An' gather'd by his artless lays
  A never-dying name.
While heather blooms on Scotia's hills,
  An' burnies join the sea,
His aft-applauded "Nichts wi' Burns"
  Will ne'er forgotten be.

Ye gentle maids! a tribute pay
  Frae 'mang your Western bowers,
An' strew the minstrel's lowly grave
  Wi' summer's balmy flowers!
Then rest thee, minstrel! Tho' thy harp
  Can noo nae mair be found,
The lovers o' auld Scotia's sangs
  Can ne'er forget its sound!

Gourdon Schoolhouse.

W. J.

Footnotes

[1] Bell's house, when we leave the road, is midway between Nashville and Louisville, and 90 miles from each city.

[2] In St Louis I saw part of a panorama of the Upper Mississippi, which a French artist named Pomerade has been engaged on for some years, and which he has nearly finished. It is beautifully painted, and must prove very interesting, for he has introduced Indian scenes, customs, &c., and has also machinery which sets the steam-boats agoing, &c. He intends to have four views from the Mammoth Cave as drop-scenes; if he succeeds in giving anything like a faithful representation of them, it will add much to the *eclat* of his picture.

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