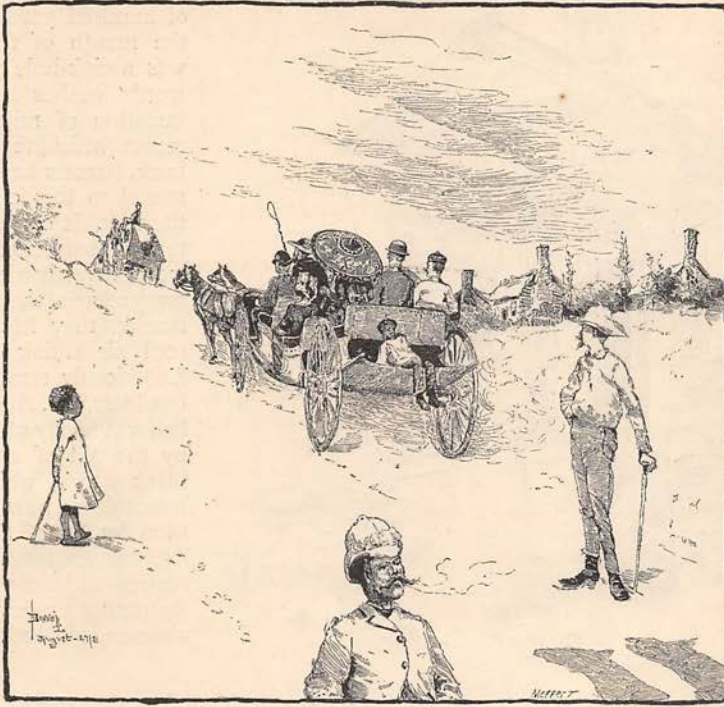


THE CAVERNS OF LURAY.



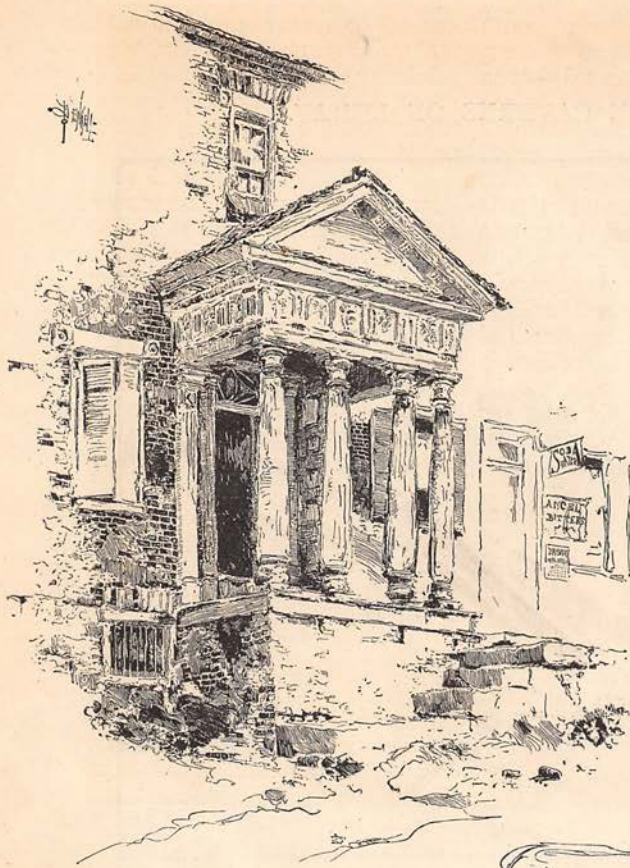
ON THE WAY TO THE CAVERNS.

THAT the underlying limestones of Page County, Virginia, were penetrated by crevices, horizontal cracks, and some caverns of respectable size, has long been known. The general valley of the Shenandoah is here badly broken up. At Riverton two streams unite to form the main river. Between them lies the Massanutton mountain—an isolated range parallel with the neighboring chain, and dividing their water-sheds. Inclosed by it and the Blue Ridge, and drained by the South Fork of the Shenandoah, lies the Page Valley, with the small village of Luray, as county seat, in the center.

Page Valley is here several miles wide, and the surface is diversified by an endless series of knolls, ridges, rocky outcroppings, and deeply imbedded streams. "The rocks throughout the whole of this region have been much displaced, having been flexed into great folds, the direction of which coincides with that of the Appalachian mountain-chain. In fact, these folds are a remnant of the results of that series of movements in which the whole system primarily originated." Hid-

den in the woods near the top of one of these hills, about a mile east of Luray, an old cave has always been known to exist. Connected with it are traditions which reach back to the Ruffiners, the earliest settlers of the valley. Peter Ruffiner the First was a Hanoverian, who married the daughter of a wealthy Pennsylvania farmer, and moved down into this wilderness, where he possessed himself of a large tract of land and raised fifteen children. His eldest son, Peter the Second, also got him a wife and fifteen children, so that the colonization of the valley proceeded with great rapidity. One of this first generation of Ruffiners went out hunting one day, and did not come back. At the end of nearly a week's search, his gun and powder-horn were found at the mouth of this cave, within which the famished and nearly dead man was at last discovered. Of course nothing less could be done than to call it Ruffiner's Cave, which is printed on all the maps in attestation of the truth of this history.

Knowing something of this cave, in the summer of 1878 Mr. B. P. Stebbins conceived



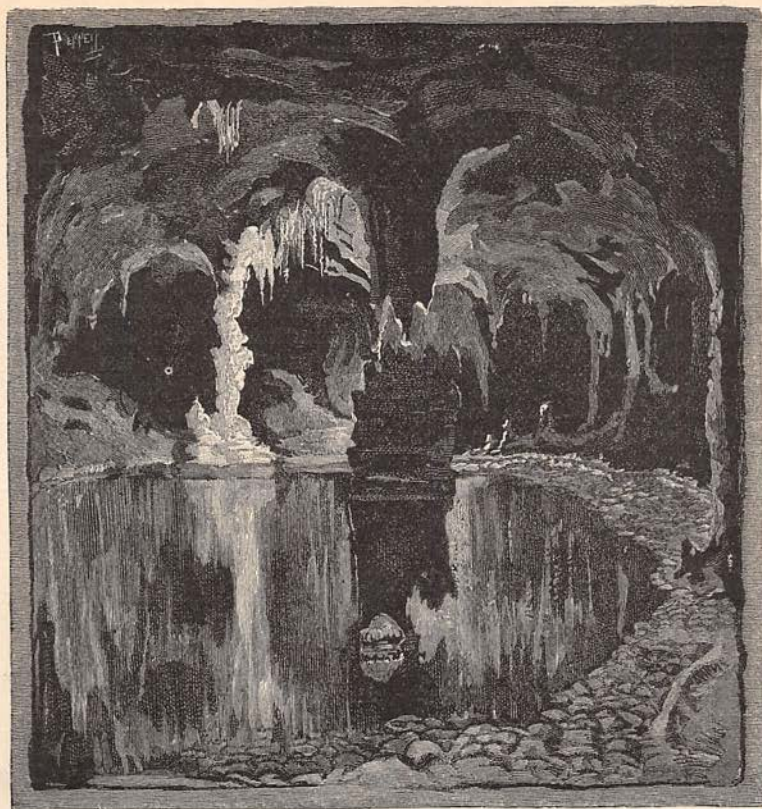
PORCH OF RUST HOUSE.

the project of a more complete exploration of it, with a view of making it an object of interest to tourists, and he invited the coöperation of the brothers Andrew and William E. Campbell. These gentlemen declined to go into the old cave, but were ready to engage in a search for a new one, and it was finally agreed to form a "company" for that purpose. Together they went ranging over the hills on both sides of the valley, across the fields and in and out of the abundant and tangled woods, examining every depression, peering into all the dark corners, stooping under rocky ledges from which the rattlesnake had first to be expelled, enlarging holes from which scared foxes darted in dismay or in which they drew their skins into a minimum of bulk, hiding their bushy tails and skulking in the uttermost end of their half-natural burrow. They parted thickets only to find that they did not hide the coveted prize, which, unlike most prizes, would have an increased value in proportion to its hollowness! Nearly four weeks spent in fruitless search had its only effect in exciting the astonishment and ridicule of their neigh-

bors, when, returning one August day from a long tramp, they approached home over the hill where Ruffner's Cave was. In the cleared land on the northern slope, a couple of hundred yards or so from the mouth of the old cave, was a sink-hole choked with weeds, bushes and an accumulation of rails and loose stones which, for generations back, farmers had been accustomed to toss in there out of the way. It occurred to them that this suspicious hollow was worth investigation. Clearing away some of the rubbish, they fancied they felt currents of cool air sifting up through. Laboriously tumbling out the bowlders, Mr. Andrew Campbell was finally able to descend by the aid of a rope into a black abyss, which was not bottomless, however, for he soon let go of the rope and left his companions on the surface to their conjectures. Becoming uneasy at his long absence, his brother also de-



COTTAGE AT ENTRANCE OF CAVE.



BRODDUS'S LAKE.

scended, and together the men walked in a lofty passage for several rods, where their progress was stopped by water. Returning, they told Mr. Stebbins what they had seen, and all agreed upon a policy of silence until the property could be bought. Then they went home and dreamed of "millions in it." Such was the discovery of the Luray Cave.

Dreams are but a "baseless fabric." The property was bought of a bankrupted owner, at sheriff's sale, but upon an intimation of its under-ground value, one of the relatives of the original owner sued for recovery upon an irregularity in the sale, and after two years of tedious litigation, in which the case was carried to the highest court, he won his suit. Previously, a company of Northern gentlemen, most of them also interested in the local railway, formed a joint-stock company to purchase the property, and it passed into their hands in the spring of 1881. But during the two years, the original cost had swelled, and the early visions had dwindled, until they met at \$40,000. This is the history of the "wonder," and now we are ready to enter it.

The ground rises only a trifle from the level of the valley to the hill, and on the

open slope stands a house with porticoes all around, conspicuous in fresh paint, and having a public air about it. There is the ordinary appearance of public waiting-rooms about this house, but, unlike most houses, the great interest of it lies in its cellar. Registering your name, your guide gives you a tin frame much like a scoop-shovel, held upright by a handle at the back, which holds in front three lighted candles. He opens an inner door, and you follow him down a staircase of masonry, and before you grasp the idea that your adventures have begun, you find yourself in the large antechamber of the caverns. This unpremeditated, unintentional entrance is as though you had been dropped in the midst of it, or had waked from a sleep there, and is most effectual in putting the stranger *en rapport* with the spirit of astonishment which he must feign, if (by reason of any sad defect in his constitution) it is lacking, in order to maintain his reputation in this locality as a respectable person. At the same time the truth is pressed upon your mind, that this cavern is not in the side of a mountain, as your preconception of it would suggest, but underneath one of the low hills which

diversify the surface of the valley, and which remain from the hollowing out of all the valleys, and the production of the mountains four or five miles distant on either side; and the cave "has no obvious relation with them, except that its origin was partly coincident with their origin, and with the excavation of the valley by erosion."

When the Campbells first entered this antechamber, which is about as large as an ordinary barn, they were able to follow a narrowing extension of it only a little way, when, as I have said, they were stopped by water. Some weeks later, in order to make a second exploration, they took a small boat with them, but found that the water had nearly dried away. We can now walk across on a causeway of clay for twenty-five or thirty yards, past the Vegetable Garden, the Bear Scratches, the Theater, the Gallery, over Muddy Lake on a planking bridge, which is itself spanned by a stone arch; through the Fish Market and across the Elfin Ramble—a plateau in which the roof is generally within reach of the hand—and so come to Pluto's Chasm, an underground ravine roofed with the strata which support precisely similar gulches and chasms open to daylight, and owing their configuration to the same slow and subtle agencies. Most persons, trying with their gaze to fathom a depth which their candles' beams fail to penetrate, but which, by and by, their feet lead them to, are tempted to exclaim, "What mighty convulsions rent these walls asunder!" forgetting the unparted stratum of native rock overhead. But *cataclysm*, as the all-potent word to explain every hard conundrum of geology, is obsolete. As in the fable of the hare and the tortoise, an agency infinitely slower, a very type of gentleness, has done the same work while the convulsion slept.

Great caves can only occur in a limestone region, and they result from the chemical fact that the carbonates of lime and magnesia are soluble in water containing carbonic acid. "This acid abounds in atmospheric air, and is one of the products of the decomposition of animal and vegetable waters, so that rain-water which has percolated through the soil has usually been enriched with it from both sources. With carbonic acid, then, as the active agent, and water as the carrier, we are able to account for the disappearance of strata however thick, and whether above or below ground. Above ground the result is a lowering of the general level, the deposition of a residual stratum of clay (a constituent, in a finely divided condition, of the Valley limestones), and the formation of valleys where special causes have favored the disin-

tegration of the stone. 'Hard' water flows away, and a clay soil is left behind. Below ground, on the other hand, the result is a cave—if there be a fissure in the strata through which the acidified water may make its descent. In the course of time this fissure is worn larger, and the entering water dissolves and bears away with it bit by bit the stratum through which it passes, flowing out at some lower level with its burden of lime and magnesia, but leaving the clay behind to plague the adventurous cave-hunter."

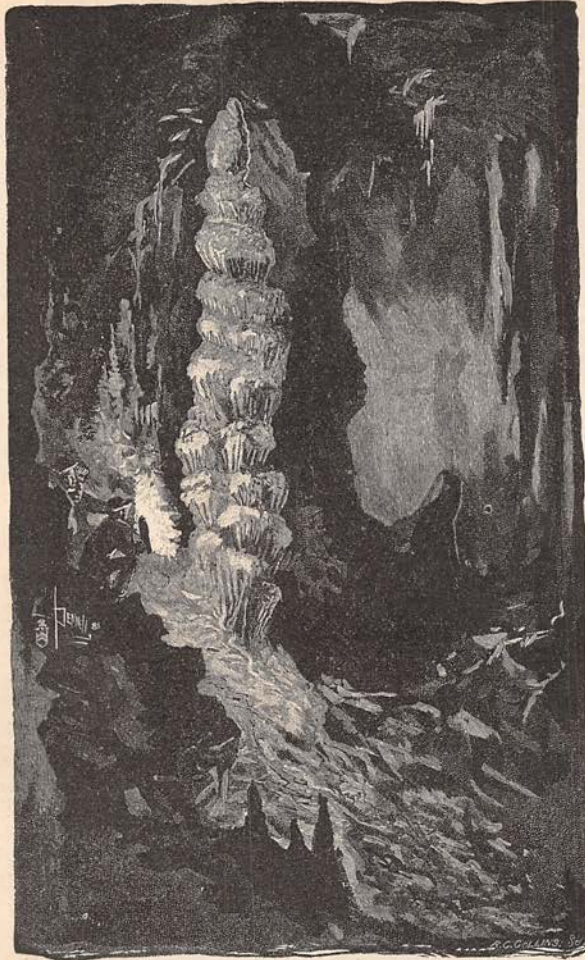
Given the initiatory crack—common enough in limestones—and it only requires time and abundance of water to hollow out Pluto's and all the other chasms, halls, galleries, and avenues which make up this or a more extensive series of caverns; and when once this work has well begun, other natural agencies contribute their aid to the enlargement of the area and the adornment of its interior.

From the chasm, where there is a Bridge of Sighs, a Balcony, a Specter, and various other names and habitations, we recross the Elfin Ramble, walk, wherever dry, on mud or tufaceous floor or ringing rock (when honey-combed, sounding hollow beneath the tread), and in muddy or difficult places upon bridges of pine planking, which rots away and must be replaced every nine months. We pass successively Titania's Veil, Diana's Bath—the lady was not fastidious!—and come to a very satisfactory Saracen Tent.

Then we ascend stair-ways past the Empress Column,—easily empress of all, I think,—and proceed under the Fallen Column to the spacious nave of the Cathedral. We pause to note its lofty groined roof and gothic pillars,—surely, in some like scene to this, the first architect of that style met his inspiration!—its large, Michael-Angelesque Angel's Wing, and its Organ. Then we sit down and turn to the prostrate stalactite. It is as big as a steam-boat boiler, and bears an enormous pagoda of stalagmitic rock which has grown there since it fell. It thus forms a good text for a conversation.

Here Dr. C. A. White, of the Smithsonian Institution, stands as authority. The rock out of which Luray Cavern has been excavated is a compact, bluish limestone, not very evenly bedded, and weathering ruggedly on account of its heterogeneous texture, a fact to which the almost endless variety and irregularity to which it chiefly owes its charm is largely due. The few fossils discovered indicate that this limestone stratum is of lower silurian, probably belonging to the Trenton period.

The position of the cave in the middle of an open valley, distant from the mountains,



BURNING MAGNESIUM TAPE BEFORE THE EMPRESS COLUMN.

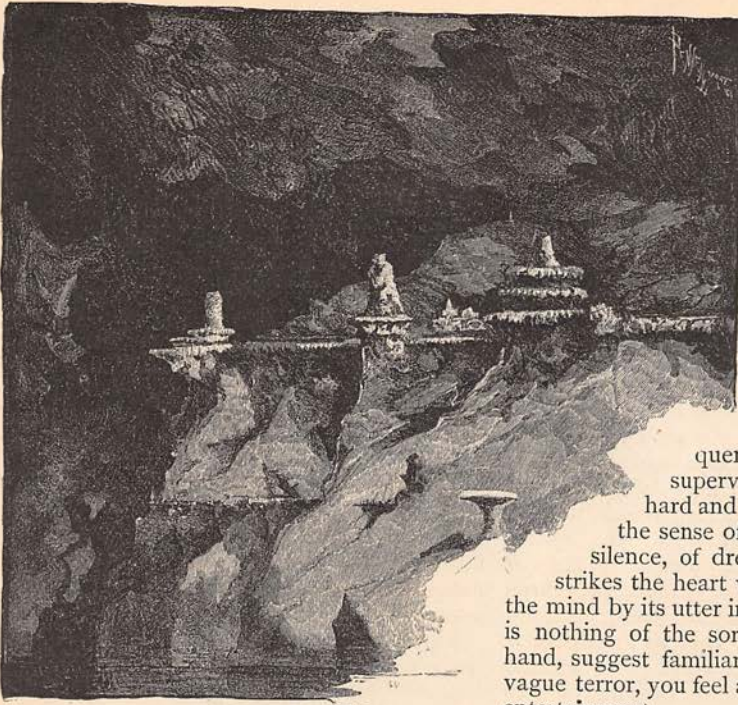
and so much below their crests, shows that it was hollowed out toward the close of the epoch within which the formation of the valley took place. The character of the erosion leads to the conviction that the excavation was effected subsequently to the formation of the great folds referred to at the beginning of this article, which plainly took place after the close of the carboniferous period, because strata of that period and those of later date are involved.

It is thus evident that the geological date of the origin of Luray Cave, although it is carved out of silurian limestone, is considerably later than the close of the carboniferous period. None of the facts yet ascertained warrant a more definite conclusion concerning the limits of its antiquity than to say that the most recent epoch at which it might have been formed is the tertiary. It is highly

probable that the date of its origin is not more ancient than that of the Mammoth Cave, or the Wyandotte in southern Indiana.*

Now, these geological statements tell one the relative position which the cave occupies in cosmic history, but they help the mind little in comprehending its antiquity measured in years or even by centuries, and serve chiefly to make our vamping on the subject seem of extremely small account. Nor can we get at a much better estimate by studying the present processes of change, for evidently these have not gone on uniformly since the beginning,—both erosion and new growth varying from year to year at every point, and proceeding in no two parts of the cave at exactly the same rate. The indications are, that in past ages the work went on with great

* See SCRIBNER'S MONTHLY for April and October, 1880.



ON THE BANKS OF THE RHINE.

rapidity, but that latterly change has been very slow, and at present has almost ceased.

Leaving the Cathedral, a narrow, jagged passage, where one must continually guard both his shins and his crown from painful bumps, we get an outlook down into a sort of devil's pantheon, full of grotesque shapes and colossal caricatures of things animate and inanimate, casting odd and suggestive shadows in whose gloom fancy may work marvels of unworldly effect, and leads you by a stair-way to a well-curtained room called the Bridal Chamber. With an access of that idiocy with which the strongest people, perhaps, are tinctured when about to enter matrimony, one or two couples have come to this damp hole to be married; so the place is put down in descriptions as "consecrated"! The back door of the Bridal Chamber admits to Giant's Hall, just beyond which is the Ball-room—both large and lofty apartments, constituting a separate portion of the cave, parallel with the length of Pluto's Chasm. In the Ball-room we have worked back opposite the entrance, having followed a course roughly outlined by the letter U.

I have thus run hastily over the greater part of the ground open to the public, in order to give an idea of its extent and nomenclature. To describe each figure and room separately is impossible. The best I can do is to try

to give some general notion of the character of the ornamental formations of crystalline rock which render this cave without a peer in the world, perhaps, for the startling beauty and astonishing variety of its interior. Some caves—the Mammoth is an example—are completed by the simple digging out of their vaults; no subse-

quent growth of new rock supervenes to decorate their hard and changeless walls. There the sense of vast vacancy, of awful silence, of dreadful, lonely darkness, strikes the heart with awe, and impresses the mind by its utter intangibility. Here there is nothing of the sort. Objects are near at hand, suggest familiar forms, and, instead of vague terror, you feel a comfortable and lively entertainment.

Where conditions of dryness and ventilation are favorable and the percolation of water is just right, stalactites and stalagmites will form as they have done here, though rarely in equal profusion and attractiveness. Their formation is simple. Whenever through some of the minute crevices in the limestone roof or wall a drop of water trickles, it is sure to be saturated with carbonic acid, and to bear along with it a solution of lime and magnesia. When, emerging from its rocky channel, it meets with a current of air, it will evaporate and leave behind it minute crystals of carbonate of lime deposited in the form of a ring, because, as the drop evaporated, the solid matter became more concentrated around its edges than in the pendent center. "This ring now becomes the support of the drop, and the process continues until a tube of the diameter of the drop, and from one to thirty-six inches in length, is formed. At this stage of its growth it begins to fill up, and the water now trickling exteriorly deposits its solid matter and enlarges it." This process forms a hanging appendage of stone exactly as icicles grow—large at the top because the larger part of the lime is deposited before the drop reaches the tip, which nevertheless prolongs itself downward with never-ceasing endeavor to touch bottom.

But, in the majority of cases, more water flows down a stalactite than can be evaporated, and drops to the floor, depositing, parti-

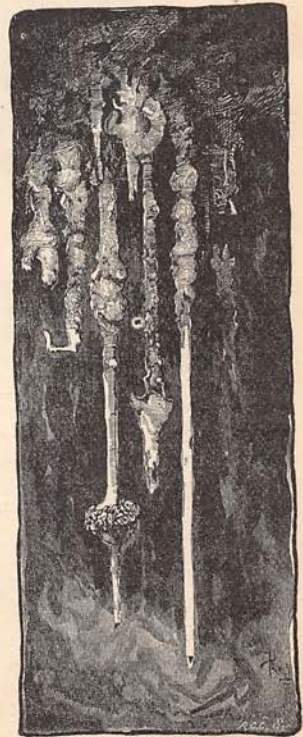
cle by particle, its solid matter in the same spot, directly underneath the tip of the stalactite, until a column corresponding fairly to the size of the stalactite is built up; this is a stalagmite. In time, the upward reach of the one and the downward stretching of the other may join them into a single column, thick or slender, reaching from floor to ceiling. There are many such pillars, seeming to support the roof, in this cave—hundreds of them, from the size of a fishing-rod (and wonderfully resembling a bamboo stick, with every node perfect) to that great column in the center of Giant's Hall, which is fifteen or twenty feet in circumference and is ribbed like an ancient oak or redwood; pillars representing all sorts of architectural style in base and capital, for the sculpture-like growth and commingling of these stalactites and crystallizations lend themselves easily to every odd design and fantastic embellishment, which yet never seem inharmonious.

Though the simple stalactite will be circular and gradually decreasing in size, conically, from its attachment to its acuminate point, yet innumerable variations may occur, as the dripping or streaming water that feeds it is diverted from its direct and moderate flowing. Where it runs slowest, but copiously, or at least continuously, there most lime will be deposited, and the stony image will be built up to the prejudice of a less favored part. Thus it happens that stalactites often become expanded at their ends far beyond their size at the top, or take a slanting line; then the stalagmite underneath learns also to lean in the same direction, so that when they meet it will be at the intersection of two angular lines of growth. A notable example of this process is seen in the "Tara's Harp" and its snow-white feeder.

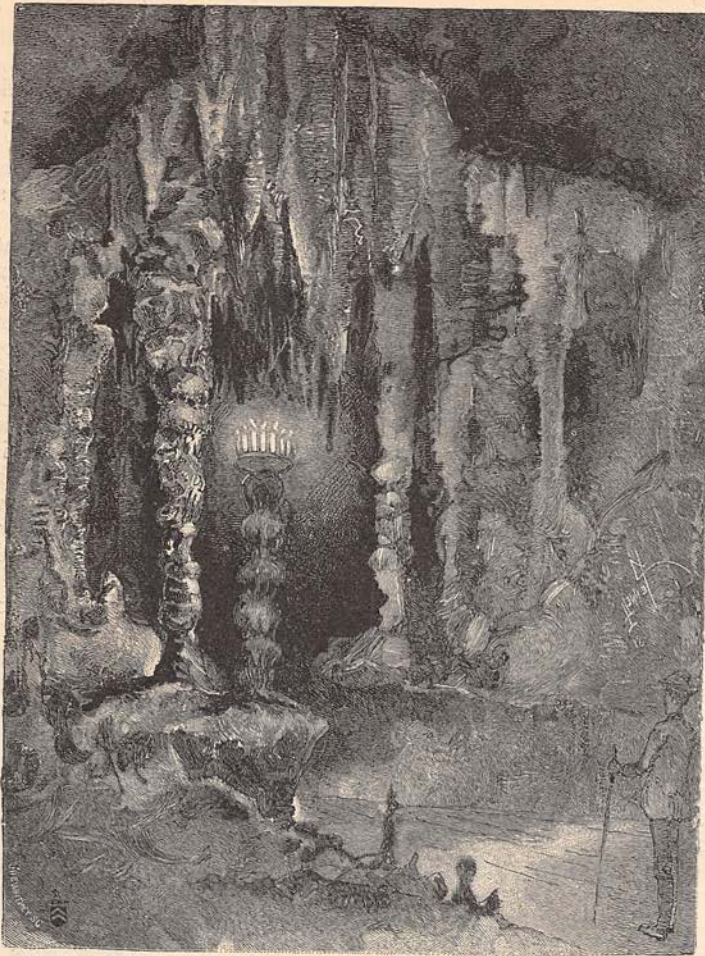
Chief of all the varieties, however, and the one that in lavish profusion is to be seen everywhere in these caverns, is that which, by growing on the edges only, produces not a round, icicle form, vertically pendent, but a wide and thin laminated or sheet form, which is best described by its semblance to heavy cloth hanging in pointed folds and wrinkles, as a table-cover arranges itself about a corner. This is most likely to happen where the water flows over the edge of a ledge or comes down through a crack, rather than by percolation through needle-point apertures, or where it oozes from the side-walls. Now the heterogeneous nature of this limestone, mixing masses of harder or more gritty substances with other fractions of a softer kind, caused it to be eroded unequally, and everywhere enormous angular masses, resting on a softer substratum, have been undermined

until they fell to the floor, stood out from the walls as protruding ledges, or were cut out from their connection with the wall-rock, and left standing as islands to be coated and reshaped and hidden away under the glittering panoply which the gnomes who did the work hastened to throw over every bit of common rock within their industrious reach. It is this channeling through soft rock and leaving hard limestone alone; this chipping away overhead and underneath a resisting stratum; this tumbling heedlessly down and sedulously piling up; this everlasting, tireless labor after grotesque change which is not yet, nor ever will be, content—these give to Luray its labyrinthine lack of shape, its chaotic multiplicity of things completed and things half-done and things not yet more than mere material, which mark it to the imagination as a workshop, or a last hasty refuge, or an unarranged store-house, of the art-workers of the under-world, who, surprised by the light of intruding day and the inquisitive, commonplace eyes of men, fled affrighted to some yet more profound habitation in the depths.

Fancy has taken the bit in her teeth, as she is most likely to do down here; but what I started out to show was, that where ledges and table-like surfaces were so abundant, there the drapery was sure to form. In the Market it crowds the terraced walls in short, thick, whitish fringes like so many fishes hung up by the gills—"rock-fish," the guide will tell you, as his little joke. The Saracen Tent is formed by these great, flat, sharply tipped and gently curving plates, rich brown in color, depending from a square canopy so that they reach the floor, save on one side, where you may enter as through conveniently parted canvas. The Bridal Chamber is curtained from curious gaze with their massive and carelessly graceful folds; the walls of



DOWN FROM THE CEILING.



A CORNER OF THE BALL-ROOM.

Pluto's Chasm are hung with them as in a mighty wardrobe; Diana's Bath is concealed under their protecting shelter; Titania's Veil is only a more delicate texture of the same; Cinderella Leaving the Ball becomes lost in their folds as she glides, lace-white, to her disrobing, and a Sleeping Beauty has wrapped these abundant blankets about her motionless form; while the Ball-room carries you back to the days of the Round Table, for the spacious walls are hung as with tapestries.

Do not disbelieve me when I speak of wealth of color. The range is small, to be sure, but the variation of tint and shade is infinite and never out of tune. A painter would, perhaps, express it intelligibly to his brethren by saying it was all a harmony in brown. The first crystals of these salts of lime are pure white and translucent. If you pick up a fallen fragment of a young stalactite, you

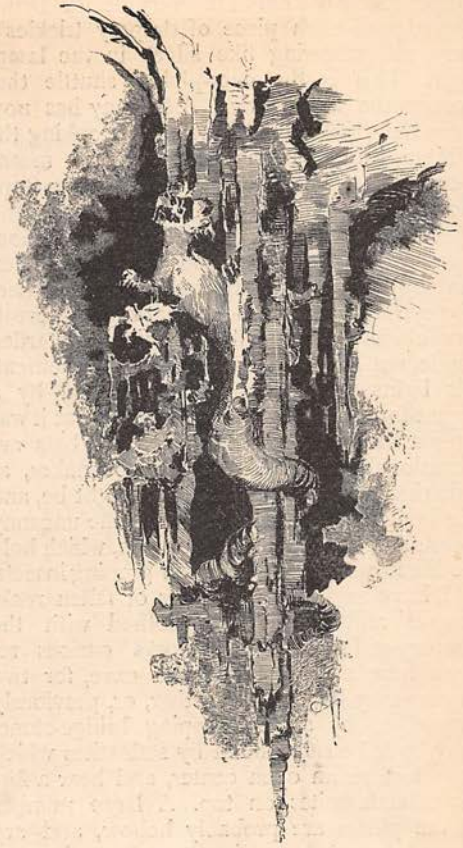
find it a white, delicate tube, glassy without, spongy within, alabaster-like, and almost transparent. Where water is continuously flowing, and crystallization at present is going on with some rapidity, as at the various "frozen fountains" and "cascades,"—which look precisely like the gleaming cataracts of sunlit ice which are to be seen on high mountains, or at Niagara in winter,—the surface is crystalline, perfectly white, like fresh marble, only more radiant and ethereal, and sparkling with a soft, snowy light. Such is the lofty and richly chased Empress Column, the Geyser, the odd little Comet, the Specter, that gleams fitfully from the Stygian gloom of a seemingly boundless abyss, a thousand alabaster pinnacles and pendants scattered here and there, and much silvery fretwork on wall and monument. But when the steady growth ceases, and fresh crystals no longer supersede with maiden purity the *débutantes* of yesterday, then

the carbonic moisture of the air eats away the glistening particles of lime, and leaves behind a discolored residuum of clay-dust and iron-oxides. If this has gone on very long, the object attached becomes almost completely decomposed; you may push your penknife to its hilt into the apparently adamantine substance of the Fallen Column. Thus it happens that, from the niveous purity or pearly surface of the new work, there runs a gentle gradation through every stage of yellowish and whitish brown to the dun of the long-abandoned and dirty stalagmite, the leaden gray of the native limestone, or the inky shadow that lurks behind. It is thus that the draped and folded tapestries in the Ball-room are variegated and resplendent in a thousand hues. Moreover, various tints are often combined in the same object, particularly in the way of stripes, more or less horizontal, due to the varying amount of iron, silica, or other foreign matter which the lime-water contained from time to time.

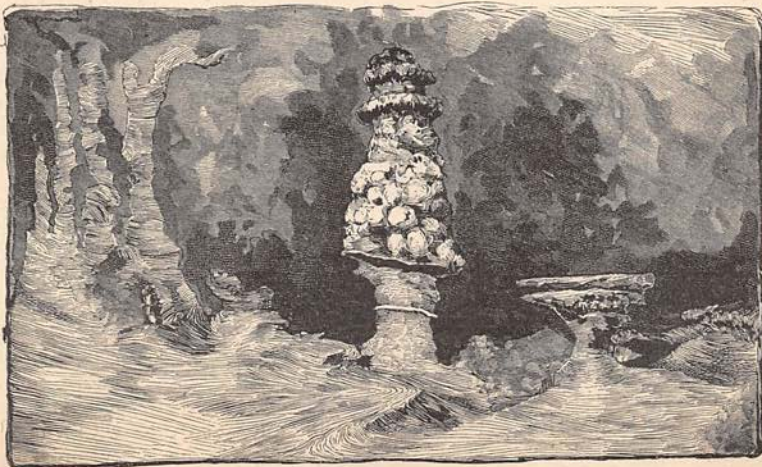
The best example of this, and, indeed, of the "drapery formation" generally, is to be found in the Wet Blanket,—a name given apparently to dampen your enthusiasm beforehand, so as to give the eye a fresh surprise. Suspended in a recess in the wall of a small sub-cavern is this curious stalactite, which perfectly simulates a blanket hung up after a wetting, every wrinkle natural to a dangling piece of heavy woolen cloth being represented, with the water yet draining out of it.

Down in Pluto's Chasm, also, is a notable group of stalactitic draperies. "They are sixteen alabaster scarfs," says a recent description, "of exquisite color and texture. Three are snow-white; thirteen like agate, are

striated with rich bands of every imaginable shade of brown, and all are translucent. The shape of each is that of one wing of a narrow lambrequin, one edge being straight, the other meeting it by an undulating curve. The



THE DRAGON OF LURAY.



UP FROM THE FLOOR.

stripes follow the curve in every detail. Down the edge of each piece of drapery trickles a tiny rill, glittering like silver in the lamp-light. This is the ever-plying shuttle that weaves the fairy fabric." A balcony has now been built right among them, overlooking the Chasm, and this point should by no means be missed. The burning of magnesium tape here brings out, with the suddenness and spectacular effect of the ballet-stage, a thousand grotesque shapes and fanciful outlines, leaving spaces of darkness between, where the eye nervously suspects that frightful creatures abide. "The devil!" exclaimed a startled guide, not long ago, as, halting for a moment, his lights were suddenly overturned by a gaunt form which shot by his feet; but it was only a hare. Wood-rats, mice, and bats are occasionally seen. There are no snakes, as one timid lady was afraid there might be, and the imagination is left to evolve the uncanny beasts out of the dens of darkness, which hold no life in reality beyond a few groping insects.

I have said that the edges of fallen rock-masses and ledges are clothed with the drapery-stalactites. This works curious results here and there in the cave, for two masses may be joined together, or, previously connected by an overlapping bridge-stone, may both be surrounded by stalactites which thus inclose an open center, and bear a forest of stalagmites on top. A large number of the pillars are probably hollow, and are formed by the crowding together of many drapery-stalactites, which finally have coalesced, leaving the pillar deeply fluted, or seamed up and down, with their disconnected edges. When you find one of these massive, ribbed, and rugged old pillars, lost above in a host of curved stalactites, their thin and wavy selvages guiding the eye to tips which seem to sway and quiver, it is hard to believe that this is not an aged willow turned to stone. Indeed, the whole scene, in many parts, is strongly suggestive of a forest with tangled undergrowths, thrifty saplings, fallen logs, and crowding ranks of sturdy trees, under whose bending limbs and drooping foliage one might wander for miles without catching the flicker of a leaf or hearing the stir of any breeze:

"The island valley * * *

Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly."

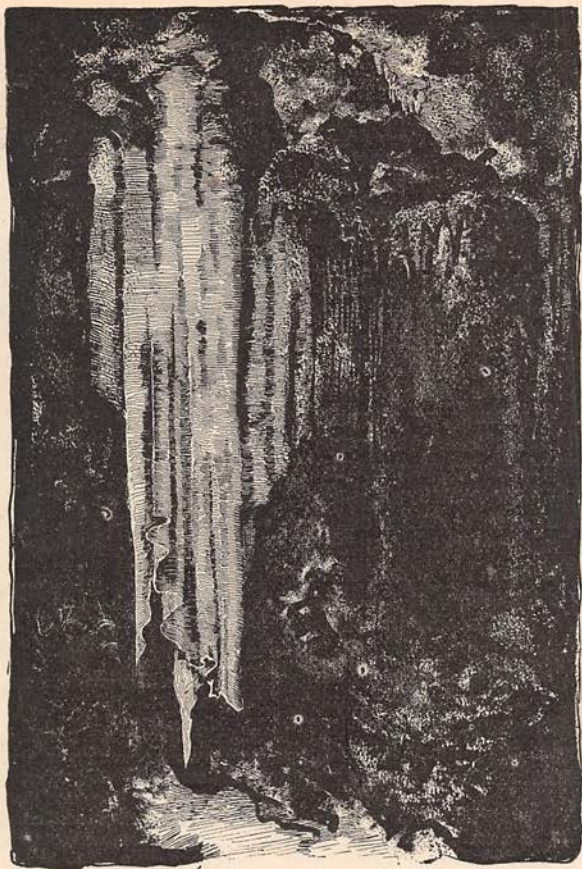
In more than the general effect, indeed, the ornamental incrustations of this cave mimic the vegetable growths outside. Many of the stalactites are embroidered with small excrescences and complicated clusters of protruding and twisted points and flakes, much like

leaves, buds, and twigs. To these have been given the scientific name of helictites, and they are ascribed "to a slow crystallization taking place on a surface barely moist, from material conveyed to the point of growth by a capillary movement." The grottoes of Stebbins Avenue exhibit them to the best advantage.

Then there are the botryoids—round and oblong tubers covered with twigs and tubercles, such as that cauliflower-like group which gives the name to the Vegetable Garden; these grow where there is a continual spattering going on. A process of decomposition, dissolving out a part and leaving a spongy framework behind, furnishes to many other districts quantities of plant-semblances, that you may name and name in endless distinction. Then in the many little hollow basins, or "baths," and in the bottom of the gorges where still water lies, so crystal clear you cannot find its surface nor estimate its depth; where your blue magnesium-flame opens a wonderful new cave beneath your feet in the unrecognized reflection of the fretted roof, and where no ice is needed to cool, nor cordial competent to benefit, the taste of the beverage;—there the hard gray stone blossoms forth into multitudes of exquisite flowers of crystallization, with petals rosy, fawn-colored, and white, that apparently a breath would wilt. You have seen a group of sea-anemones in some tide-pool, with all their downy tentacles flung out? That is like these motionless corollas of calcite.

Another freak of crystallization is the making of "cave-pearls." They lie, three or four together, in little hollows in the floor, exactly like so many eggs in a sparrow's nest. Around a grain of sand or flint, as a nucleus, accumulates a concretion of lime. Every falling drop moves the grain and prevents its becoming attached or growing into any except a globular form; thus, under the proper circumstances, marbles or "pearls" are formed.

But I must cease this attempt at even a suggestion of the possible variety of size, and shape, and mimicry, and quaint device to be met with. That hard stone should lend itself to so many delicate, graceful, and airy shapes and attitudes, rivaling the flexible flower of the organic world, fills the mind with astonishment and bewilders the eye. And when you have struck the thin and pendent curtains, or the "pipes" of the Organ in the Cathedral,—for these are only a group of stalactites which have fallen and partly buried themselves upright in the mud,—and have found that each has a rich, deep, musical resonance of varying pitch, so that with a little study you could complete the octaves and thrum a melody whose tones would be more like the



THE WET BLANKET.

breathings of an organ than the metallic quality of piano or xylophone—then your admiration is complete; the denizens of the cavern not only pose but speak. And how many, many centuries has this museum, or gallery of the “playfulness of God,” which the old geologists used to talk of, patiently been awaiting its disclosure! It is not a place for thousands of lights and the chattering merriment of excursionists, with their flirtations and junketing, but for silent and full-hearted delight.

The impressions which it all makes upon such visitors as are affected at all, beyond oh's and ah's, if written down, would make very curious reading. Of the hundreds that walk singly through these catacombs, or troop after the brass band of an excursion, few have left any record by tongue or pen; but the two best remembered by the managers about sum up the whole range of mental experience here. Both, curiously enough, were uttered the same day. The first visitor, after a long tramp, turned to Mr. Corson, and speaking slowly and impressively, said: “I feel as though I must kneel down

and render homage to my Creator for this exhibition of infinite power.” As the blue magnesium-light lifted the curtain of thick darkness in the Ball-room, and brought out in an instant the far-reaching, coruscant, theatrical sculpture of the lofty dome, the silence was broken by the exclamation of the second spectator: “It knocks thunder out of the Black Crook!”

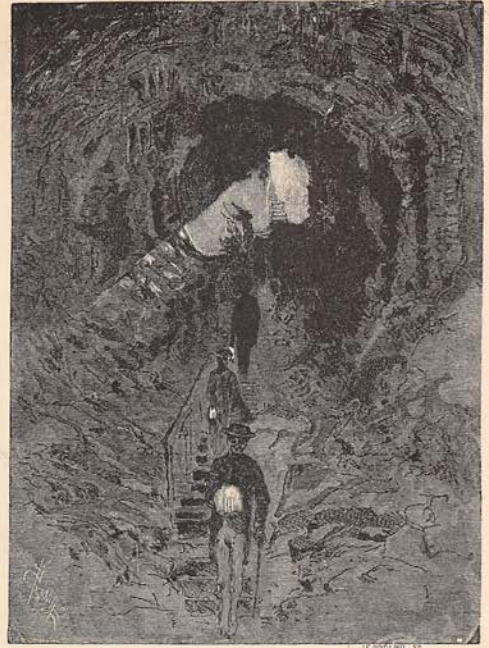
The cave has not yet years enough to have gathered about itself much human interest; but, before leaving, we must not forget to follow down a long stair-way into a deep and narrow gulch, where the dampness and gloom is little relieved by anything to please the eye. At the foot of the staircase, the guide drops his lantern close to a trench-like depression, through which a filmy brooklet trickles noiselessly. No need of interrogation—there is no mistaking that slender, slightly curved, brown object, lying there half out, half imbedded in the rock, with its rounded and bi-lobed head, nor its grooved and broken companions. They are not fallen, small stalactites; they are human bones. Fit

for the mausoleum of emperors, what a vast vault to become the sarcophagus of one poor frame! But the cave has guarded its trust well, for, while Cæsar's bones have "turned to clay," these are durable as iron.

It is remembered in the valley that, half a century ago, a dwarf lived here, and one day disappeared from view. Six or seven years afterward, his gun, and shreds of his overcoat, were discovered in the woods near the entrance to the old cave, whereupon it was concluded that he had entered and lost himself. However, the fact that additional parts of the skeleton are still buried underneath the tufaceous floor seems to disprove the theory that these are the poor dwarf's bones, since more than half a century, or a whole one, would be needed to deposit stone enough to entomb the bones, unless we discredit the evidence of the present slow growth of lime-rock in the cavern. Perhaps the owner of the femur, etc., was some Indian youth, who, three or four hundred years ago, by accident or design, entered these catacombs, and falling over the high precipice and unable to move, starved to death.*

Out into the warm, sweet air again, all the world looks fairer for one's temporary occultation. Surely the Troglodytes had a hard lot. Even the Naiads under the water, and the Nereids, though indissoluble from the growing trees, were better off!

* Mr. S. Z. Ammen, in his excellent little guide-



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book, calls these "the bones of a man—unhappy not to have possessed a copy of this book when he entered upon his explorations." My unhappiness, on the contrary, arose from the fact that I *did* possess it; for I found it had preëmpted all my adjectives, particularly that widely serviceable term, "weird."

THE FLOWER OF FLAME.

At Lyndhurst of the tall white towers
Was built a Palace of the Flowers,

That in the time of frost and snow
The children of the sun might blow.

And there, upon a winter's night,
A strange plant blossomed into light.

An elfin flower it was, in truth,—
No human eye had watched its growth.

When all the world was still as death,
It burst its bonds and broke its sheath,

And climbed upon the crystal tower,
Unfolding in a gorgeous flower

A running rose with burning briars,
And leaflets tipped with its own fires.

A living light shone from it, far
More bright than beam of moon or star.

On naked hill and barren dell
And leafless wood its glory fell,

And on the kingly Hudson's flood,
Red with a redness like to blood.

But soon this wonder, that had made
The stars grow pale, began to fade.

Its crimson petals fell as fast
As leaves before an autumn blast.

Thus, ere the dawning of the day,
It sprang to life and passed away,

And still we know not whence it came,
Or whither went the Flower of Flame.