

## A VISIT TO THE MAMMOTH CAVE OF KENTUCKY.

BY PROFESSOR W. G. BLAIKIE, LL.D., F.R.G.S.



THE MOUTH OF THE CAVE.

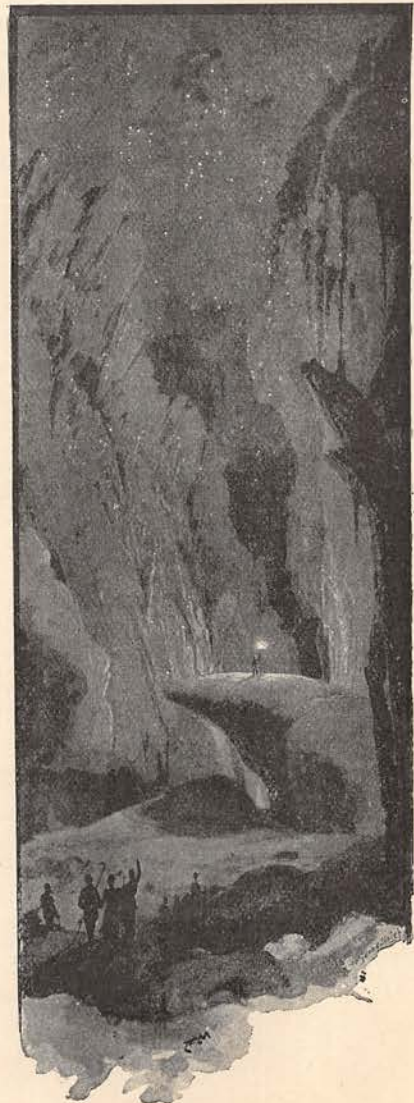
I HAD always had a strong desire to visit the Mammoth Cave, and ever since I read "Uncle Tom's Cabin" I had felt a special interest in the State of Kentucky, the celebrated birth-place of that maiden—more a geographer than a theologian—who, in answer to Aunt Ophelia's question, "In what estate were you born?" promptly answered, "Down in Kentucky." I had to go a long way to accomplish my desire. Starting from Pittsburg, the great centre of the iron industry, a beautifully situated place, but horribly

desecrated by volumes of smoke, our party spent most of a day on the railway, and reached Cincinnati in the evening. We spent next forenoon traversing that great city and its suburbs, admiring most of all its magnificent cemetery, a vast domain of hundreds of acres, like a gentleman's estate, to which, as far as its size was concerned, no designation could have been less appropriate than "God's Acre." In the afternoon we went on board a commodious and beautiful steamer, in which we sailed down the River Ohio, as far as the city of Louisville. The sail was enchanting, the evening charming, and the wooded valley through which the river cuts its way superb. The banks were so level and the steamer so constructed that no wharves or piers were needed at the places where it stopped. The vessel ran quite close to the bank.

Early next morning we reached Louisville, and after breakfast took the train for the cave. It took four hours to bring us to Glasgow Junction, where we had to leave the rail. We had a good opportunity of getting acquainted with the outer aspect of Kentucky. The name means "the wild bloody land," and it is said that though Indians never inhabited it, they often fought in it. Its Saxon explorer was one Daniel Boone, who came from one of the Carolinas more than a century ago. Boone found it an almost unbroken tangle of wood and reed. The only passages were those formed by vast hordes of buffalo, that liked to feed on the reeds. Boone seems to have been a born adventurer and pioneer, a man of great physical strength and daring. A story is told of a collision he once had with the chief of an Indian tribe. Boone had been swimming across a river, and on landing he almost rushed into the chief's arms—as powerful a man physically as himself. They fired at one another, and missed. The chief then sprang at Boone, and

they had a splendid tussle. The chief was in the act of drawing out his knife to stab Boone when the latter turned over with the Indian in his arms, and they rolled down together to the bank of the river. Placing his foot against a sapling, Boone contrived to wrench himself away from the chief, who rolled into the river at a place where its current was very rapid, sank exhausted, and was never seen again.

Kentucky is still pretty much a forest, the clearings not being very extensive, and even the fields often presenting stumps of trees projecting above the surface, like an ill-shaven beard. The forest is of oak and other hard wood; not a pine is to be seen. The



THE STAR CHAMBER.

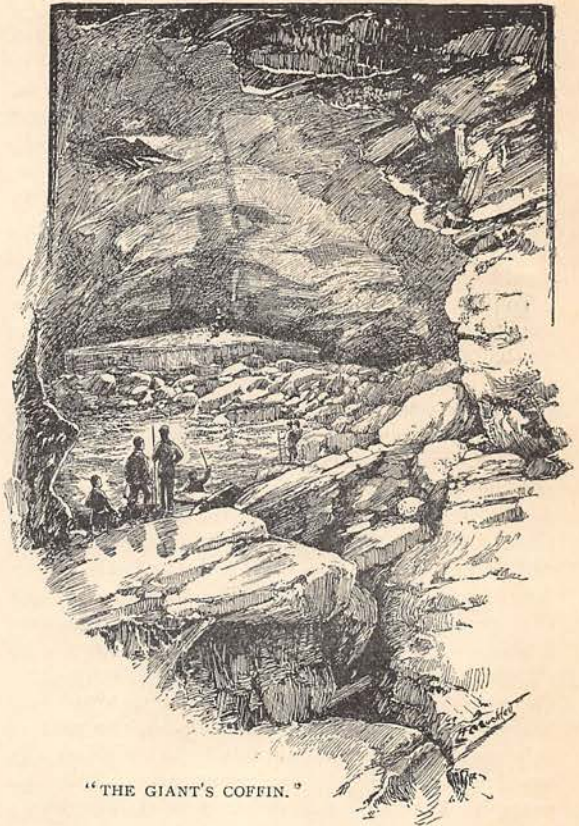


underwood is often green and luxuriant, and occasionally you see a pretty flower—perhaps a rose in full bloom, twining round a tree to the height of ten or twelve feet. As we whirled along we got glimpses of a small plant with bright red flowers, but we could not make it out till, getting the chance of a nearer examination, we found it to be the wild strawberry, with its stem rising up into the air, and ten or twelve berries hanging on it like a cluster of rubies.

Glasgow Junction hardly maintains the fame or the proportions of the great city of St. Mungo. We found it a very primitive place, consisting of a shanty or two, and so wild and unfinished as to recall an American friend's simile—the housemaid had not had time to fix it up. We were yet seven miles from the cave, to which we had to be transported on coaches of some sort, but when we arrived no trace of our "transportation" could be seen. In a rough wooden house we came on something like a dining-room, with a table covered as for dinner. It being hardly mid-day, we had no stomach for dinner, and our time being extremely limited, we were most eager to push on. But the only person who seemed to have any authority took things very coolly, assuring us that the "transportation" would be ready in due time, and urged us to dine, as we should not have another chance. This was a new view of the case, and we tried to make the best of a steak as hard and tasteless as buffalo, and a custard tart, for which the charge was three shillings apiece.

By-and-by we got into a covered waggon, drawn by two horses and driven by a nigger. There were eight or nine of us in the waggon, and our journey was over a very primitive road, if you may apply that term to what was simply an avenue cut through the trees. The jolting was very amusing; occasionally we were tossed into each other's laps. But the day was splendid, and we did not want for beautiful companions. Butterflies with wings like a lady's fan, dragon-flies in stripes of all varieties, the blue-bird of the south, and the black-bird bright with crimson patches on its wings, darted hither and thither, to show us that above ground there was something bright and interesting even in the region of the cave.

We reached Cave Hotel about half-past two, and proceeded to inquire for a guide. We were told he would be ready soon, but getting suspicious, we asked some of the gentlemen who accompanied us whether their party was ready. "Oh no," was the frank reply; "and we cannot be ready for some time. We must wait for the baggage waggon, for the ladies have to change their dresses for the cave." This was beyond endurance, and we insisted that the clerk should provide a guide for those of us who were ready, appealing to his national pride by saying that in our country we kept time, and did not wait hours for stragglers. The appeal was successful; a guide appeared in a few minutes and took charge of the four who formed our party, so that we had the rest of the afternoon for exploring the cave. The time, however, was too short for the long round, which requires ten or twelve hours; but the three or four which we spent in it were sufficient to give us a due impression of its marvels.



"THE GIANT'S COFFIN."

The cave was not discovered till 1809, when, in pursuing a bear, a huntsman came upon the opening. In form it resembles a tree laid on the ground, with an irregular stem, and innumerable branches spreading out at random here and there. Some years ago a hundred and fifty miles of it had been explored, but this is far from the whole. The stratum of rock in which it occurs, as might be supposed, is limestone, and the excavations are of all varieties of form and magnitude, and often highly picturesque in appearance. Lakes and streamlets occur here and there, but these are all eclipsed by the great lake, Lethe, which is a hundred and fifty yards long and from ten to fifty wide. The Echo River extends three-quarters of a mile. These parts are not always accessible, and as there had been a great fall of rain shortly before our visit, access to them was cut off for the time.

The first appearance of the cave is that of a vast irregular tunnel, the walls, floor, and roof broken and blackened, and presenting an appearance more interesting than beautiful. Your first sensation is that of delightful coolness, for the temperature of the cave, whether by day or night, in summer or winter, is always the same—59° Fahr. Soon after entering you are furnished with a little oil-lamp, like a miner's. It is the only means of illuminating the profound darkness, save when, to light up some interesting spot, the guide makes a blaze of oiled paper, or even, on occasion, resorts to magnesium wire. As you proceed through the gloom with your poor little lamp, you



have a strange weird feeling, as if you had entered a world of darkness; but you are conscious of no trace of damp or anything offensive to the smell. There is a buoyancy in the perfectly dry air that braces you up, something like what one experiences among the Swiss mountains. As far as you can be happy in the dark, you enjoy yourself amid the novelty of the scene; yet now and then a gruesome feeling crosses you as to what would happen if the lamps should be blown out, or if the guide should take a fit, or, proving treacherous, should leave you in the inextricable labyrinth.

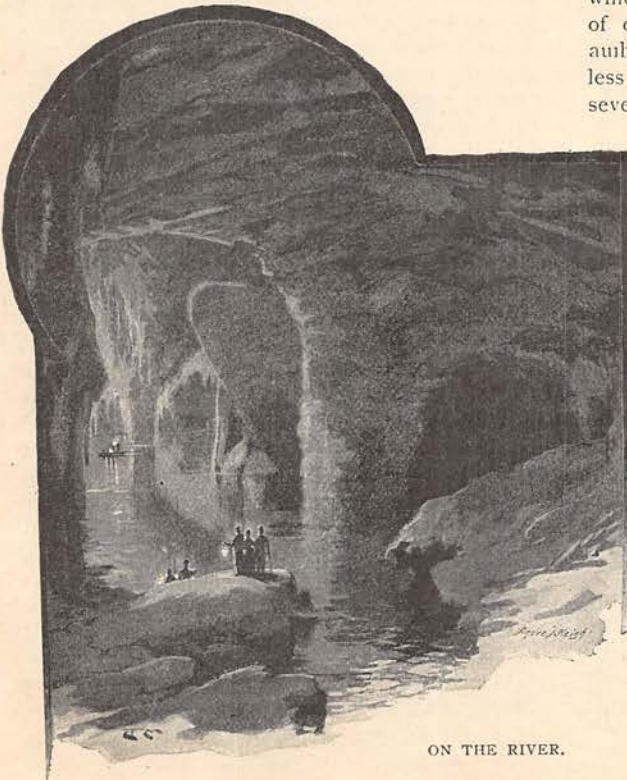
To prevent the excursion from becoming tedious as you go along, the guide needs to make the most of any unusual appearances that the cave presents. First of all, he points out the remains of a manufacture of gunpowder that took place in 1812—15, when the Americans were at war with Great Britain. To make gunpowder, they extracted saltpetre from the limestone, and the remains of the pits, with the marks of the hoofs of the oxen, the wheels of the waggons, and the parts of the rock to which the oxen were fastened, are still to be seen. At another point we were shown the remains of a cluster of houses, built about the year 1842 by a doctor, the then owner of the cave, who took it into his head that the uniformity of temperature by night and by day was the very thing for consumptive patients. A bevy of them were brought to these houses, but, as might have been foreseen, the want of light was a fatal drawback, utterly outweighing any benefit from the equality of temperature. Their appearance after a time was awful. One of them died; the rest wandered about like skeletons; the eye

sank deep in its socket, and the pupil became so dilated that the iris seemed gone.

One chief interest lies in the resemblance of parts of the cave to other objects, natural or artificial, from which they have derived their names. The "Rotunda" is a round open space, about a hundred feet high and a hundred and ninety in diameter, with some slight resemblance to the well-known Rotunda of Dublin. The "Methodist Chapel" is some eighty feet in diameter and forty feet high, and is so named because Methodist services have actually been held in it. The "Giant's Coffin" is a huge block of rock that looks like its name. Sometimes the ceilings present rare appearances. At one point is a figure resembling the animal called the ant-eater; yonder is the appearance of a man, a woman, and a child, which one of them seems in the act of throwing at the other, reminding you of Punch and Judy; and there, again, you seem to see a canopy of floating clouds. But a really good sight is shown in what is called the "Star Chamber," an apartment sixty feet high, seventy wide, and five hundred long. The guide takes your lamps from you and retires, leaving you in Egyptian darkness. By-and-by in a different part of the cave, a dim light begins to dawn, as of the rising sun, and in a little while, looking up to the ceiling, you see it studded as with stars, and among them a fine comet. Then there is the "Wooden Boat Cavern," "Martha's Palace," "Side-saddle Pit" (of which the guide says sarcastically that no one ever saw the resemblance but the man who gave it its name), and the "Bottomless Pit." This last is a deep and awful cavern, the bottom of which is fairly beyond our vision. But man is fond of clearing away mysteries, and according to one authority it has been found that after all the bottomless pit has a bottom at the depth of one hundred and seventy-five feet.

There are many other wonderful places in the cave which we had no time to see. At one time the "Bottomless Pit" marked the extreme point of the excursion, but a bridge, named "The Bridge of Sighs," has been thrown over it, and many interesting features are to be seen beyond. "Fat Man's Misery" is of course a funny place, being a narrow passage in the route, through which a fat man can hardly squeeze himself. The "Bacon Chamber" cannot but be attractive to the lovers of ham and bacon, being a fine collection of limestone hams and shoulders suspended from the ceiling, as in a Chicago smoke-house. The Dead Sea and the River Styx represent respectively the two gloomiest objects of Bible and classical story.

But the Lake Lethe and the Echo River are of deeper interest. Our access to them having been cut off, we fall back on the description of another visitor. The boat on the lake being too small to take over the whole party at once, he waited for the second trip, and describes what he saw as the boat, with its phantom-like freight, moved slowly



ON THE RIVER.



over the water, the dim lamps throwing fitful flashes of light and shadow on the rippled surface, and up to the high ceiling above; the boat then passed entirely out of view round an angle of the rock, darkness reigning on the face of the waters as in primeval chaos; and after a brief interval the Charon of the stream returned with his solitary lamp at the prow of his boat for the remainder of his freight. The entrance to Echo River is a narrow channel only three feet above the ordinary level of the water. Of course much dipping and ducking of heads is necessary here, but the low passage is but a short one.

Here it is that those remarkable eyeless fish are found, with only a faint rudiment of an eye, but no optic nerve. The origin of the *Amblyopsis spelæus*, as Agassiz named them, and of the crawfish (*Astacus pellucidus*), a crustacean which in the cave is also eyeless, but not elsewhere, has been the subject of much discussion among naturalists. Agassiz himself was of opinion (but not dogmatically) that the animals were created eyeless. Other naturalists hold that they once had eyes, but that the organ died away when they were placed in circumstances in which it was of no use. And others, accepting evolution à la Darwin, maintain very confidently that, though the possibility of an eye existed, it was never evolved, because in the struggle of life fish with eyes could have had no advantage over those that were eyeless. Darwinism lays an awful load on that "struggle of life." The question is too difficult and demands too much professional knowledge to be dealt with here.

About seven o'clock we left the cave. On emerging

from the entrance the light was very charming, yet we sustained a shock. The outer air was so hot that we seemed to have plunged into a furnace. We rushed back to the cooler atmosphere as if we had been burnt, and had to brace ourselves for the serious effort of traversing the quarter of a mile that separated us from the hotel. In the dark of evening the fire-flies were a beautiful sight, flashing brightly at every movement of their wings. Sauntering towards the cave, I saw what I took for a fire-fly of remarkable brilliancy, and as it was moving steadily towards me I went behind a bush, in hopes of catching it as it passed. When preparing for the capture, lo and behold, it was not a fly, but one of the guides from the cave, quietly waving his little oil-lamp!

I have been rather surprised to find that comparatively few Americans have ever visited the cave. It does not seem to impress them. It is too dark, too dull, too unsensational—an abode of death, not a scene of life. This is true, but at the same time it has an interest of its own. It reveals to us a world without light; it shows us what our world was like when darkness was upon the face of the deep, and what a glorious change took place when the Almighty fiat went forth—"Let there be light!" It shows, moreover, that Nature is never at a loss, that even in the dark it can fashion its materials into many a remarkable and interesting form. But surely its great lesson is: What a blessing for us that this is an exception, an anomaly: that it is no man's home—the very opposite of what God has made our home! And thus it leads us to prize the more the blessing of light, and all the glories that but for light we should never know.

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## THE MYSTERY OF BROADMEAD COURT.

BY LUCY FARMER, AUTHOR OF "CHRONICLES OF CARDEW MANOR," ETC. ETC.

### THE RESEARCHES OF MARY AMBUSH.—II.

#### CHAPTER THE FIRST.

##### AN IMPORTANT QUEST.

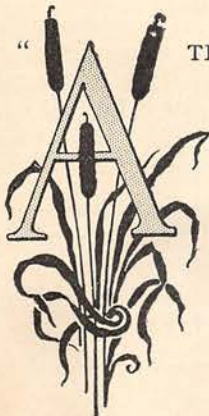
"TELEGRAM, miss, if you please," said my maid early one morning. "Waiting answer."

I turned from my toilette-table, glanced at the contents of the orange-coloured envelope, and tossed it aside.

"No reply," I said.

But though I thus summarily dismissed the message and the messenger, I knew quite well that my employers would not have sent such an early telegram unless some very important business were on hand.

Immediately after breakfast, therefore, I went up to town to see Mr. Howson, my "chief."



"Come in, Miss Ambush," he said, as soon as he heard that I had arrived. "I want you. That will do, Bob."

Bob, the "odd" boy, retired reluctantly, and Mr. Howson, having made sure that no one else was within hearing, pointed to a chair, and leant towards me.

"Now, miss," he began, "are you game for a big business? Take your time; but if you say 'Yes,' it must mean 'Yes.' If you say 'No,' very well; someone else may take the job."

"What is it?" I asked tentatively.

"I can't tell you: that's the perplexing part of the business. I mean, of course, that I am unable to give you any details. Read that letter," he concluded.

He tossed a note over to me from his desk, to which he had turned again. As he re-seated himself near me, I began to read. Mr. Howson waited patiently (for him) until I had finished.