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INTO THE EARTH'S DEPTHS

Continued from page 10

river, and the main galleries lighted by electricity. Tourists can now explore the cavern in perfect safety, and even have lunch underground, for the guardian has fitted up a neat little restaurant about fifty feet below the surface.

This cave is well worth a visit, for the forest of huge stalagmites over sixty feet high and the stalactites reflected in the pure unruffled surface of the river and illuminated by powerful arc lamps, make a spectacle too magnificent to be described in words.

By the way, I may mention another legend connected with this cavern. When Joan of Arc drove the English out of France, so goes the story, some of the English soldiers took refuge in this cavern and brought with them an enormous sum in gold sewed in a calf skin. How they got into the cave, and whether they ever got out again, the legend does not state; but at any rate they are said to have thrown the gold into the subterranean river. When I bought the cave the landlord actually put a clause in the contract that if I ever found the sack of gold I was to give it to him. I gravely promised I would; and further that if I ever found Old Nick's "orthopedic shoe" or any other part of his wardrobe or belongings I would give that up too.

Needless to say, I never did find anything, though I dragged the river—not for gold, but for blind fish. I have found small beetles and spiders, both blind, hundreds of feet below ground. No plants, however, except fungi, are ever found any great distance from the shaft.

We have nothing in Europe so large as your Mammoth Cave of Kentucky. The Mammoth has been explored to a distance of ten miles, and the largest in Europe is Adelsberg in Austria, six and a quarter miles; Aggtelek in Hungary, five and a half miles; and Kleinhauel in Austria, four and a half miles, comes next; and the fourth largest is Bramabeau in France, which is a furlong or so more than four miles.

I would like to tell you of the strange and beautiful sights I have seen underground—Rabanel, for instance, where I found an immense hall, like a cathedral, three hundred and thirty feet long and nearly five hundred feet high. That reminds me that you will perhaps wonder how I tell the height of a cave's roof.

It is simple enough. Among the multifarious things I take down with me are a small Montgolfier balloon made of strong thin paper, neatly folded, a sponge and a bottle of alcohol. If the ceiling is too high to be touched with a pole, I fasten the sponge to the paper bag, pour some alcohol on it, light it, and away goes my balloon to the roof and carries a thin silk twine with it. That gives me the exact height at once.

What made the splendid cave of Rabanel look still more like a cathedral was that at the far end near the roof was a circular aperture—another opening that we did not know of—and as it was overgrown with plants and the sun was full on it, the resemblance to the rose-windows of some grand old fane was remarkable.

Another splendid hall was at Gapina Gill in Yorkshire, England. A brook empties itself into the cave through the only entrance; and I had to go down three hundred and sixty feet through a waterfall—rather a damp and dangerous undertaking, as you may imagine—and

could not use my telephone, for the receiver was full of water, though I could send messages. At the bottom, the water spread itself over a large chamber five hundred feet long, one hundred feet wide and ninety feet high. Then it flowed away down a tunnel at one end of the chamber. Sometimes these underground streams come to the surface again several miles away.

There is a legend that a shepherd once dropped a whip down the shaft of a cave, and his sweetheart who lived on the bank of a brook some miles below found it floating in the stream a day or two later. She wrote and told her lover, and he replied that he would send her a sheep by the same method. He led the animal to the brink of the pit; but it struggled so that the man lost his footing, and it was his corpse and not the sheep's that the girl found opposite her cottage door.

I carry with me a bottle of fluorescein—a deep dye, extracted from coal-tar. One part of this will tinge twenty million parts of water sufficiently for its presence to be recognized by a machine constructed for the purpose. It has led to some curious experiments.

I hope I may tempt American readers to take to cave-hunting. It is a sport that should suit your national character—your pluck, skill and perseverance. That reminds me that two years ago I visited the interesting cave of Drach, in Majorca, one of the Balearic Isles.

One of the chambers is called the "Hall of the Lost" and one of the stalagmites bears this inscription in Spanish: "No hope remains." It records the adventure of three men who entered the cave at six o'clock one morning, lost themselves, and were rescued at ten o'clock the same night by an innkeeper who lived near. Fancy an American or a Briton scrawling that "no hope remained," when he had been little more than half a day in prison! Why, I should never have found out in that time that I was lost even, so much of interest is there to see. There is a fairy lake in that cave on which my little boat floated for hours amid a virgin forest of stalactites and stalagmites of dazzling whiteness and all sorts of quaint and beautiful shapes.

Just one word in conclusion. As I have visited every cave worth seeing in Europe, and a few in Asia and South America, I ought to have some theory as to the cause of their existence. Some geologists think they have been caused by earthquakes, which in my opinion is absurd; others say the action of water, which seems more reasonable and is, I think, correct in some cases. But I believe that in most cases caves have been formed by the action of carbonic-acid gas. It rather tells against my theory, though, that I never but once met with choke-damp. That was at Roque de Corne, when Armand, who was going first down a second pit, asked us to pass him a safety-lamp, as his candle, which he was holding low, would not burn.

Gaupillat shouted to him to come back, and we lowered a candle, which went out at once. Another time, as he was crawling through a "bottle-neck" leading from one chamber to another, Armand stuck fast, cutting off our air. Our candles soon sputtered out, and we began to gasp and choke. At last with a supreme effort the burly "cork" was got out and we breathed again.

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