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XXIII. *Description of a Cavern near Chudleigh in Devonshire. By Mr. J. JONES, of Pembroke College, Cambridge. Communicated by the Author.*

THE Devonshire marbles have been lately much in request for ornamental purposes; and since it has been found impossible to obtain the more costly marbles of Italy, the attention of our artists has been directed toward the produce of our own soil. The strata of limestone or marble traverse the country in various directions, adding considerably to the beauty of the scenery; for at some places they sink beneath the surface of the earth, and at others rise with majestic grandeur to a nearly perpendicular height of two or three hundred feet, presenting from their summits views not to be exceeded for extent or picturesque effect by any in the kingdom; and what adds considerably to their appearance is, that their tops are not barren, but ornamented with mountain plants and a lively verdure, and their sides are rendered shaggy by the shrubs and trees which grow in abundance from their crevices. These hills are particularly interesting to the traveller, and may not prove uninteresting to the geologist; for caverns of considerable magnitude have been discovered within their bowels, in which a profusion of stalactitical and stalagmitical depositions abounds. The most celebrated of these caverns are Kent's Hole in the vicinity of Torquay, and the Piscies'-hole in Chudleigh rock near the town of Chudleigh: the first I have never seen, but have frequently visited the latter.

The Pixies' or Piskies' Hole, as it is commonly called, being the supposed habitation of a diminutive race of fairies, is situated in part of the rock which faces the woods of Ugbrook Park, the seat of Lord Clifford: the ascent is rather difficult, being narrow and winding; but after having ascended for a short time, the entrance presents itself almost concealed by trees and shrubs: the entrance is $10\frac{1}{2}$ feet in breadth, and 9 feet in height, and the same dimensions are nearly preserved for $67\frac{1}{2}$ feet after you enter the cavern: it then suddenly diminishes into a narrow hole not exceeding 3 feet in height and 7 feet in breadth: before you enter this narrow passage you are necessitated to descend on your hands and knees, and light your candles, for without light it is impossible to explore the interior of the cavern: this narrow passage is the greatest difficulty to be encountered; but it is not of any considerable length, not exceeding 57 feet: at its extremity you suddenly emerge

into a large and magnificent cavity, formed within the bowels of the rock, of considerable magnitude, and not cheered by a single ray of light from above: huge pieces of rock which must have fallen from the top impede your progress, and considerable caution must be observed in passing over these fragments. The length of this cavity is 39 feet; its greatest height about 50 feet, and breadth 12 feet; it terminates in a narrow cleft, too small to admit a middle-sized man: the silence of this cave is never disturbed, except by the bats which are observed to be suspended from the top; and the sound produced by the labourers from without, blasting the rock, reverberates through the hollows like thunder. A great number of stalactites depend from the top, assuming various forms; but they are not remarkable either for whiteness, or beauty of appearance. The rock consisting entirely of limestone, of course all the depositions are calcareous: one deposit demands particular attention, as it is considered the guardian idol of the cavern: it is situated on the left hand as you enter, a few feet from the bottom, and presents the appearance of a human head; it is commonly called the Pope's head. The reason of this appellation it would be perhaps now difficult to discover: owing to the continual droppings from above, its surface is soft, and all visitors are desired by the guide to stick a pin into the head, to serve as a defence against the machinations of the fairies. From this principal cavity another branches off of greater regularity and of a more vaulted appearance: this second passage is 9 feet in breadth, 11 feet in height, and 72 feet in length; it is called the Pixies' parlour, and the bottom is sufficiently level to admit of dancing. Here fires are lighted, and parties regale themselves: the effect is awful and striking, the flames playing about the cavern, the sound of the music, and the resounding echos of the voices. Banditti might have chosen this as a proper place to have held their revels. At the extremity of this cavity the light is seen streaming through the rock from above, and on looking up you perceive a narrow opening of considerable height; at the top of which huge masses of rock seem suspended over your head, and strike the mind of the spectators with terror lest they should suddenly be crushed to pieces. This was certainly the first opening by which the cavern was entered, and the narrow passage was afterwards effected by the hand of man: its regularity forbids the idea of its natural origin.

Besides the abovementioned chambers, several narrow entrances are discovered, which may perhaps lead to the
discovery

discovery of other cavities equal to those already explored. But the foot of man has never yet passed into those concealed caves; and the traditions of the vulgar respecting them are of the most fearful kind: unfathomable depths of water, with all accompanying horrors, are predominant*. That water may sometimes be collected in those cavities, may not be improbable; yet I have thrown down several stones, and water was never heard, and the stones soon reached their termination. One tradition is worthy of being remembered: a dog was once thrown into one of those pits, and some weeks after it emerged at Botter rock near Heniock, a village about four miles from Chudleigh; and the most remarkable part of the tale is, that all its hair was rubbed off: this is a degree of consistency not often to be observed in popular tradition.

Having finished the description of the cavern, I shall now hazard a few remarks respecting the use to which it was applied by the Aborigines of Damnonium. Caves were certainly the first habitations of the wandering tribes, and perhaps first suggested the idea of constructing more convenient places of abode. Some savages are now found ignorant of the means of constructing any settled habitation, and who retire to the crevices of the rocks as a defence against the inclemency of the weather†. The Eastern nations seem to have been more particularly attached to subterranean abodes. The deeds of Jesus Christ are said by the inhabitants of Palestine to have been performed in caves‡. Xenophon particularly describes the caves of the Armenians§; and the temples of the Hindoos are frequently placed in excavations at first formed by nature, and afterwards improved by art: such is the singular cave in the Isle of Elephante, and the caves of Carli and Kenneri||. By the Orientals, caves were used as places of abode, as retreats in case of defeat from the enemy, and as temples for the celebration of religious rites. The first colonists of Damnonium proceeded from the East. This hypothesis was first stated by Sir George Yonge, and supported by Polwhele in his excellent historical Views of Devonshire. Major Welford has more recently conjectured, that the sacred Isles of the Hindoos were situated in the Western Ocean.

* Risdon in his Chorographical Survey of Devon, in page 332, last edit. when speaking of Chudleigh, says: "There is a cave hereabouts that creepeth far under the ground, of which many marvellous matters are spoken."

† See Collins's Account of New South Wales.

‡ See Harmer's Observations, and Maundrell's Travels.

§ *De Expeditione Cyri*, lib. 4.

|| Asiatic Researches, vol. ii. and Valentia's Travels, vol. ii.

We cannot for a moment suppose that people capable of undertaking long and tedious voyages were ignorant of the means of constructing houses; yet the caves might attract their attention either in a military or religious point of view. The Pixies' Hole was undoubtedly known to the earlier inhabitants of Damnonium. Art has been used in forming the narrow passage; but it presents no appearance of having been diminished in size. The first entrance to the cavern was effected through the cavity I have before described, as descending from the side of the rock. When the interior was gained, a more commodious outlet was desirable; the narrow passage was then formed, of small extent, by which means all hostile attacks were prevented. It is impossible to account for the sudden diminution of the first entrance, and the regularity of the second passage, by any other conjecture.

However convenient the Pixies' Hole might have been as a place of retreat during the time of hostile invasion, it never seems to have been used for a religious purpose. Yet its awful shades and lengthened caverns, the venerable rocks and wood by which it is surrounded, would have admirably accorded with the superstition of the Druids: but after the most laborious search I have not yet been able to discover any Druidical antiquities in the immediate vicinity of Chudleigh, notwithstanding the numerous tumuli still to be observed on the hills of Halldown, distant but a few miles, afford convincing proof of a once numerous population; although the absence of Druidical remains tends to remove all conjectures respecting the religious use of the cavern. I am unwilling to suppose that it passed unnoticed by the Druids. The singular stalactitical deposit called the Pope's Head may, without any inconsistency, be named the Deity of the cavern; and the superstitious usages of former ages have not yet entirely vanished, as respect is paid to its singular and striking form. I have but one more remark to offer, and that respecting the origin of Gothic architecture. It has been confidently asserted, that groves of trees first suggested the Gothic arch, nave, and transept of our ancient cathedrals*. But it seems more probable that the vaulted roof and stalactitical pillars observed in caverns first gave the idea. Religious rites were at first performed in caves; and when removed to groves and buildings, the priests and people endeavoured to retain the form of these ancient natural temples, from whence arose the solemn and massive grandeur of Gothic architecture.

February 29, 1812.

* See Warburton's Notes on Pope.

XXIV. *On*