

Poole's Hole.

A NARRATIVE OF AN ADVENTURE MADE IN THAT CAVERN BY
MR R. WHITTINGTON, OF STEVENAGE, HERTS., ON THE
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Communicated by Mrs. MARGARET C. LONG.



ON a tour to the North of England, in August last, in passing through Derbyshire, I made a stay of a day or two at Buxton, and curiosity led me to see Poole's Hole.

Poole's Hole, as described by several writers, is a wonderful subterraneous cavern, situated at little more than half a mile from Buxton, at the foot of a large hill, and appears to have had its origin from some dreadful convulsion of nature. I was accompanied by the guides, who reside near the entrance of the cavern to be in readiness to attend the curious traveller. The entrance into the cavern is through an aperture in the rocks, so narrow as to admit but one person at a time, and so low, that a middle sized person cannot walk in without stooping, but soon opens into a lofty wide concavity, in comparative resemblance like unto a spacious cathedral, but of great extent; the air, just within the narrow entrance, is excessively cold and damp, though the moment you enter the wide space, the air is found to be much more mild and temperate; but, as my object is not to describe what has so often been described by others, I shall content myself with saying, that I advanced with the guides, five in number, and each carrying a light, and directing my attention to the various curiosities of the cavern, until we came to a piece of projecting rock

encrusted with spar, which is called Mary 'Queen of Scott's Pillar,' so named (I am informed) by that unfortunate princess when she visited this cavern. Here we made a stand, as the guides informed me this pillar was the boundary of most people's curiosity ; before me appeared a steep rugged declivity, of considerable depth. I now asked the guides, if there was not a possibility of proceeding to the extremity of the cavern ; they said, there was, but it could not be attempted without considerable difficulty and danger. The guides not appearing inclined to go any farther, I took one of their candles, curiosity urging me to proceed. Having got down the declivity, the passage, for a short distance, was narrow and winding, the lights in the hands of my guides were rendered no longer of service to me, and what I had apprehended, I had now the mortification of being convinced of, which was, the light of my small candle, being insufficient for me to discover the roof of the cavern, which, from the immensity of the height, I conceived, must have had an awful effect. The sides, in many parts, as high as my light would enable me to see, were covered with petrefactions, though none that I observed worthy of particular description. The bottom was here much more rugged than that part of the cavern most frequented, owing to the numerous fragments of fallen rock obstructing the passage. Following the passage, I soon arrived at the foot of a lofty precipice, which the guides had informed me of, saying, that if I adventured, I should find a hole at the height of about eighty yards, through which I must pass to arrive at the end of the cavern ; I with difficulty, and not without some danger, climbed the precipice until I arrived at the chink in the rock which the guides had mentioned. It was just large enough to admit a moderate sized person. The height of the precipice to this aperture, I think, was exaggerated by the guides. It appeared to me not more than fifty or sixty yards perpendicular height. Beyond this aperture the *bottom* of the cavern, if I may be allowed so to name it, ran nearly parallel with the aperture, and was composed of loose stones which had fallen from the roof, some partly encrusted with spar, and of various shapes and sizes, some immensely large, and lying as rude as chaos, rendering the passage

very unpleasant. The roof was now in most parts visible, (appearing very rugged, and in general encrusted with petrefactions) although the sides were in some places so widely extended, that both sides were not discernible at the same time. Having arrived at the extremity of the cavern, which I conceived to be about half a mile from the entrance, I took up a piece of rock and struck off some of the white spar, which contained some particles of a petrified quality, similar in appearance to what is called Bristol stone, and equally transparent. Should any person, in future, adventure to this place, I could wish to caution them against striking the rock violently, as the moment I faced about to return, a piece of rock fell near me from the roof, as I suppose, in consequence of being shaken when I knocked off the spar. Having proceeded some distance, on my return, I came, to my very great astonishment, to another extremity of the cavern. As the guides had said I could not lose my way, I immediately conceived this part of the cavern to be unexplored. I returned and endeavoured to find the aperture on the top of the precipice, but in vain. At length I discovered a chink in the rock, which, at first appearance, I thought to be the aperture before mentioned, but, upon examination it proved not to be the same. Conceiving it to be almost impossible for a person to climb from the rock below to where I then was, my candle being burnt nearly to my fingers, I found I had no time to lose in deliberation, therefore determined to adventure, whatever might be the consequence. At the hazard of not being able to return, and also of extinguishing my candle, I let myself down upon the rock, which I effected by clinging with my hands and dropping at once upon the rock below; when upon the rock, a space so extensive presented itself, that I could but feintly discern the roof and opposite side of the cavern, the bottom was invisible! With the most imminent danger of falling, I then got down the side of the rock (which was as steep as the roof of a house) to the verge of it, when holding myself with one hand, and holding out the candle with the other, nothing was to be seen beneath me but a yawning gulph, which appeared to be bottomless; with difficulty I climbed back to the top of the rock, and

again endeavoured to descend wherever it seemed most practicable, but without effect: I then attempted to get back through the chink, this was also impracticable. The only chance which remained, was to call to the guides, in hopes of being heard, which I endeavoured to do by exerting my voice to the utmost, when, as soon as the reverberations of the echo had ceased, nothing was to be heard but the drops of water tinkling from the roof and sides of the cavern, except which, all was as silent as death! I then with resignation seated myself upon the rock, and for a few moments gave myself up for lost, having no other idea of my situation but that I had got into a part of the cavern never before seen by man. Nothing remained for me to do but sit and see my candle expire, which I was well convinced could not last many minutes longer, at length, after a short time spent in the most solemn suspense, I thought I heard a humming noise at a distance, which drawing nearer, to my unspeakable comfort, proved to be two of the guides, who had come forward in search of me. The hope now returned of once again beholding the light of the sun. Nothing could exceed the astonishment of the guides at seeing me in such a situation, they immediately declared that no person had ever been seen there before, and that it was impossible to descend without being dashed to atoms. I could now discern my situation more clearly; I found myself perched upon a rock that overhung a precipice of at least forty or fifty yards perpendicular height. Fortunately, one of the guides had the temerity to ascend the rugged side of the cavern to within twelve or fifteen yards of where I was situated; I then having the assistance of another light, descended with the greatest difficulty and danger to within a short distance of where the guide was standing, the guide was standing upon a rock that projected about two feet from the side of the cavern. Between me and the guide was an open space of about three yards in width, and, by the best observation I could take, of between thirty and forty yards in depth, the side of the cavern beneath me perpendicular, and the face of the rock to which I was clinging, was also nearly perpendicular. As I was unable to turn, the guide told me to step

backwards, which I did, and fortunately caught the rock ; and excepting a slight contusion, descended in safety.

The curiosities of the peak are certainly numerous and wonderful. Much has, at various times, been written concerning them, particularly of Poole's-hole ; I recollect having read in some author, an account of this cavern being nearly a quarter of a mile in height, which, from the observation I was enabled to make on my return, having descended where the height of the cavern was the greatest, I think, is exaggerated by at least one half. I am credibly informed, the height of the cavern does not in any part exceed two hundred yards.

The only cause of my wishing to make my adventure public, is, that it may operate as a caution to the curious and adventuring traveller, who may in future visit this cavern.

