

THE WESTERN CAROLINIAN.

THE POWERS NOT DELEGATED TO THE UNITED STATES BY THE CONSTITUTION, NOR PROHIBITED BY IT TO THE STATES, ARE RESERVED TO THE STATES RESPECTIVELY, OR TO THE PEOPLE.—Amendments to the Constitution, Article X.

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Miscellaneous.

HAIR-BREADTH ESCAPES.

Since I last wrote to you I have explored several more of those limestone caverns with which the country abounds, one of which, indeed, is said to extend, like an enormous cellar, beneath the village of Abingdon, a flourishing country town about twenty miles from this place; but no cave that I have yet seen compares with the natural tunnel of Scott county. It is a vaulted passage way of two hundred yards, through a mountainous ridge some five or six hundred feet high. The ridge lies like a connecting mound between two parallel hills, of about the same elevation as itself; and a brook that winds through the wooded gorge between these hills appears to have worn its way through the limestone strata that binds the two together. The cavernous passage is nearly in the form of an S. The entrance at the upper side is through a tangled swamp, where, in following down the stream, you come in front of a rude arch, whose great height, from the irregular face of the cliff being covered with vines and bushes, it is difficult to estimate, until you attempt to throw a stone to the top of the vault. The ceiling drops a few yards from the entrance, till at the point where, from the peculiar shape of the cavern, the shadows from either end meet in the midst, it is not more than twenty feet high. The vault then suddenly rises, and becomes more lofty and more perfect in form as you emerge from the lower end. Finally it flares upward, so that the edges of the arch lose themselves in the projecting face of the cliff, which here rises from a gravelly soil to the height of four hundred feet, smooth as if chiseled by an artist, and naked as death. The width of the tunnel varies from fifty to one hundred and fifty feet, the small stream winding through its centre.

The sun was in the centre of the heavens as I stood beneath that stupendous arch, watching the shadows wheeling around the airy vault above me, and yet more than half the day was in deep shadow. I have been told, whether truly or not, that the place was a favorite retreat for bears and panthers; and while following down the brook a few yards, I was somewhat startled, upon casting a glance into a recess in the rocky bank above me, to meet a pair of bright eyes glaring from the bushes which sheltered the rock. But the sudden movement of drawing a pistol frightened the wild animal from its cover, and it proved to be only a raccoon that glided along the trunk of a fallen tree, and disappeared in the thickets above. I passed again and again in retracing my steps through the sinuous vault, to admire its gloomy grandeur, and then mounted my horse which was tethered in the swamp at its entrance.

My road led immediately over the tunnel, but the thick forest on either side precluded a view from the top of the precipice, unless by approaching its edge. This was necessary to do on foot. The gloom, thus viewed, presents the appearance of a mere fissure in the mountain side; but the chasm is so sudden and deep that the first glance is startling when your foot presses the edge, and your eye swims when it would pierce the shadowy gorge below. The tall sapling growths of buckeye and hickory that spring within the dell, and lift their slender stems and arched leaves so aspiringly, yet faintly, towards the light, sink into mere shrubs when viewed from this eminence, while the pines and oaks around you, which had appeared equally insignificant when viewed from below, seem now almost to interlace their branches over the gulf. A thrilling incident is said to have occurred here a few years since. There is a cavernous recess about midway in the face of the precipice, whose height, you will recollect, is estimated at more than three hundred feet; and some bold adventurer determined to let down to explore this fissure. He easily found some of his acquaintance who consented to assist in the experiment, and, standing on the edge of the chasm, they began to lower him down by a rope attached to his body.

After descending some forty or fifty feet, our adventurer discovered that the side of the precipice inclined so much inwardly, that it was impossible for him to touch the wall even at so short a distance from the top. It was necessary, then, to provide some pointed instrument by which he could hold on to the face of the cliff as he descended. He was accordingly pulled up about thirty feet, and then, after providing himself with a "pig" or long fishing spear, much used in the adjacent rivers, he started anew on his perilous voyage. The rig appeared to answer its purpose extremely well, though the task of thrusting it, from time to time, in the crevices of the rock, was both tiresome and exhausting. The point proposed was just attained and the patient adventurer was about to reap the reward of his toil, and plant his foot in the fissure, when his companions shouted from above that their coil of rope ran out.

It was too provoking to be thus a second time disappointed, when his object seemed almost within his grasp, and but a few yards of cord would have enabled him to complete his purpose. He had given too much trouble and encountered too much peril to abandon his design completely. Thus remained the bold cragman as, clinging like a bat to the wall, he hung midway between heaven and earth; and determining not to give up his point he shouted to his comrades to splice a grapevine to the end of the rope. The substitute was easily procured, and being quickly attached more rope was at once paid out from above. He hid

now descended so far that the shelving precipice projected far over his head, almost like the flat ceiling of a chamber; but still his fishing spear enabled him to keep close to the face of the rock, and practice now taught him to handle it with dexterity and confidence. He was at last opposite to the cavernous opening he would explore, and without waiting to measure its depth he balanced himself against a jutting point of rock with one hand while with the other he struck his javelin at a crevice in the side of the deep recess before him. The spear fell short, the adventurer was at once detached from the face of the cliff to which he had been so carefully adhering, and the great angle at which the rope that sustained him and been now drawn, sent him swinging like a pendulum over the frightful gulf. The grapevine—a strong and secure as long as there was a perpendicular pull upon it—now cracked and split, as if the fibres could not bear the strain, while the weight at the end of it spun round in the air, and the frayed bark fell in strips upon the alarmed cragman, as he watched it grate off upon the edge of the precipice above him. He maintained his self-possession, however, while his companions pulled carefully and steadily upon the fragile cable. He soon saw the knot at which the rope was tied to it in their hands, and a shout of triumph hailed his approach to the top, where he was at last safely landed perfectly content, one may conceive, to forego all the pleasure that might have arisen from a more satisfactory examination of the recess, from which he had made so expeditious and involuntary an exit.

The hair-breadth escape of this cool climber of crags reminds me of one equally thrilling that I received from the lips of the hero of it, soon after entering these mountains. I had heard of a remarkable salt petre cave within a few miles of the inn where I was staying, at Cumberland Gap, and was anxious to explore it. There was an individual in the neighborhood who was said to have worked in the cavern, in manufacturing saltpetre, at a time when there was a great demand for gun-powder during the last war. This man I attempted to procure as a guide; but though he acted as pioneer for me to several wild scenes, nothing could persuade him to take me to it. He, at length, with some emotion assigned his reasons, which will better appear after I have given you the features of the place as they were described to me.

The opening of this cavern is in West Virginia, on the side of the Cumberland mountains, but one of its branches has been traced far into the adjacent State of Kentucky, and there are said to be several chambers of it in Tennessee. I have myself, indeed, in exploring its supposed passages, that opened two miles from the same embouchure, passed the dividing line of two of these States.—The most direct of these branches has, in former years, been measured with a chain to the extent of seven miles. The form of the cavern is so remarkable as its size, as, just far enough within the entrance to avoid it in darkness, there is a precipice of more than two hundred feet—two hundred and sixty-two is said to be the measured depth—and the only mode of advancing further into the cavern is by descending here, when you come to a flat surface, whereon your further progress is unimpeded. The sides of the precipice are marked here and there by ledges of rock, and the persons employed in manufacturing saltpetre had, with considerable ingenuity, adjusted a chain of ladders from one ledge to another, so as to form apparently a continuous stair-case down the perpendicular side of the cliff.

At the close of the war, twenty years ago, the cave became deserted. The population there was not dense ground, and there being but little travelling along the nearest highway, the place was seldom mentioned and never resorted to. It chanced one day, about six years since, that the man whom I wished now to guide me thither passed the mouth of the cavern with a companion in hunting; sitting down near it to refresh themselves, they began to recall their recollection of those who had worked in the cave in by-gone years, and the period seemed so recent that they thought it worth while to look whether any of their implements then used were yet to be found in the pit, determining that any of the tools that might be left after so long an interval would be a fair prize for themselves.

Entering the cavern, they first, by the light of a pine torch, carefully examined the wooden ladders, which had now been for sixteen years exposed to the damps of the place; they had been made of cedar, and still appeared sound. The cautious hunters agreed that all was right, and both descended. They reached the bottom in safety, and, as expected, they found several neglected tools still remaining there; and, selecting a pick-axe and a spade, they commenced their ascent upon the ladders. The first flight was soon accomplished, but their steps became slower as they got farther from the bottom; and as the implements which they carried could not be balanced upon the shoulders, each had but one hand upon the ladder, and, of course, as that became tired each was compelled to move more and more carefully.

Patience and steadiness, however, at last brought them near the summit; in fact, the upper round of the ladder was in view, when the foremost man taking hold of one more decayed than the rest, it broke in his grasp, and he fell backward with his whole weight upon the chest of his companion; the other reeled and staggered with the blow, but still kept his one hand held upon the ladder. The iron tools went clanging to the bottom. There was a moment of intense anxiety whether he could sustain his comrade, there was another of thrilling doubt whether his comrade could regain the ladder, and both were included in one mortal agony of fear and horror. But the falling man clutched the ladder instantly, and laying a frantic grip with both hands upon the sides, they gained the top at last together. "Stranger," concluded the man, while his voice faltered at the end of the tale, "we look to God at the mouth of the cave, and swear never to enter it more."—A Winter in the Far West.

INTERESTING EXTRACT.

And this is the Dead Sea, and below these dark waters are the sites, perhaps the ruins, of Sodom and Gomorrah, such as when the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.—There is a tale that nothing living, not even a bird, can ever cross this sea. But there is no need of imaginary stories to brighten the desolation of the scene, and yet, as well as other travellers, can tes-

tify its inaccuracy by our own observations.—We believe, however, that its waters are unfavorable to animal life; and though a shell or two may be occasionally picked up upon the shore, yet these have been probably brought down by the Jordan. The water is excessively bitter and nauseous; and if, additional evidence were wanting, we also could testify to its great gravity, and to the buoyancy of the human body, when immersed in it. It is only by much exertion, and for a very short time, that any one can get and remain below the surface.

"We went from here to the Jordan, and struck the river where tradition says the children of Israel passed over, when they first entered the Land of Promise. On the west side is a low bottom, and on the east a high sandy bluff, and the shores of the river are covered with aquatic bushes. The water was thick and turbid, and current rapid, and too deep to be sounded. For Jordan overflowed all his banks all the time of harvest." And here did cross the Jewish nation, over this turbulent stream, "on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan." And we followed their route to Jericho, the frontier city of the Canaanites, where the people shouted with a great shout that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. "There is no city now to take, nor are there any walls now to fall. There are a few miserable hovels, made of rude stones and mud, and the ruined walls of a building of the middle ages, where the wretched Arabs burrow, rather than live. Jericho disappeared as completely as her rival cities, which sunk before the wrath of the Almighty. And it requires an effort to be satisfied that here the miracle which attended the entrance of the Jews into Canaan was performed, though the truth of the denunciation is before the eyes of the traveller: "Cursed be the man before the Lord that raiseth up and buildeth this city Jericho."

Thus speaks L. Cass, American Minister at Paris, who, in August, 1838, stood upon the shores of the Dead Sea, traversed the trackway of two Israelites through the wilderness, and noted the place of their passages across the Red Sea.

THE LAST "PANTHERS" LEAP.

AN ILLINOIS ADVENTURE.

It was a beautiful afternoon in the Indian summer, that season which particularly in the Western portion of our country, is of all others the most enchanting; the bright beams of the sun were tempered by the cool and refreshing breeze that ruffled with soft music the parti-colored foliage of the trees. All who have stood at this season of the year on the prairies of the West, with uncovered brow, will recall the beauty spread wide around them far better than I can describe it. Seizing my rifle, I left my uncle Jonathan's log hut and wandered leisurely over the prairie in the direction of the wood. Having passed through a corner of the forest, I found myself near a small bluff, upon the top of which I could plainly discern the stately outlines and branching antlers of a buck, pointed in dark lines against the horizon. Entering the skirts of the forest once more, I crept warily round the hill, in order to approach unseen within biting distance of the object of my pursuit. Stooping low, I hurried behind the rugged line of rocks at the base of the hill, until I reached a place from which I supposed I could command a prospect of the whole broad summit. Nor was I mistaken; for on peering carefully over the edge of the rock, I beheld my game in fair view about a hundred yards distant, little suspecting an enemy, at least in that direction. Throwing the muzzle of my rifle over the rock, I took a deliberate aim at his side, and pulled the trigger. The quick crack of the cap alone followed. This was a disappointment; but quick as possible I cringed behind the rock, and trembling with eagerness, sought for another cap. After consuming twice the time necessary, and scattering my caps in all directions upon the ground, I was at length once more in a state of preparation. My heart beat as I saw the majestic animal still occupying his former position, though with head erect, snuffing the breeze, and darting his lightning glances in every quarter, unknowing in direction to flee to avoid the death. Again I pointed my iron and fired. The noble buck sprang into the air, and I sprang over the rock. When I reached the spot, his limbs were already quivering. In loading again, I found I had but one charge in my flask; so with all convenient haste, as it was now nearly sunset, I drew my long knife, which formed an indispensable item in my hunting accoutrements, and having dissected the animal which I had slain, proceeded homeward, loaded with the skin and two quarters, which was all I could conveniently carry, and which, with my piece, formed a very respectable burden. Striking into a path which I supposed would conduct me by a nearer route through the forest, I hurried on with all the speed my log would allow. But after consuming sufficient time to have brought me out, I was somewhat surprised at discovering that instead of drawing near the opening, my path seemed to become less distinct as I advanced, and to conduct me further into the depth of the forest. However, I pressed on with alacrity, deeming it sure that I should soon emerge, and knowing that to retrace my steps would only be conducting me in a course directly opposite to my home.

It was now growing quite dark in the wood, by which the indistinctness of the treacherous path I had followed was of course increased. When standing still with doubt and uncertainty, the long drawn howl of a wolf came with fearful distinctness on my ear. So suddenly it came, it pierced like a knell "the fearful hollow of my ear," announcing in a tone not to be misunderstood, the hour of companions I should be likely to have, should I be compelled to pass the night in the woody labyrinth—a prospect which, though by no means agreeable, seemed yet not improbable. Nevertheless, I resolved to proceed, and either to come safely out, or brave whatever dangers I might encounter with a manly heart. Wandering on as well as I might in my former direction, I soon found myself near a brook which murmured on through a shady dell, and immediately determined to follow it, satisfied that it must, sooner or later, conduct me into the open world once more. It was now after sunset, and so dark that I could scarcely see how to pick my dubious and fearful way. I would have lightened myself of my bur-

den, but the increased howling of the wolves, which seemed to be gathering in a body behind me, warned me that it might soon become only protection. You may be sure that these not musical but most melancholy notes tended not to diminish my speed or trepidation, and I seemed to be chasing down the little brook with all the demons of the pit crowding and yelling behind me.

Presently I could detect a discordant note among the voices of this infernal choir, which I knew at once to be the cry of the panther, than which I would rather have met in general assembly all the wolves of the forest. Notwithstanding the increase of speed caused by the last unpleasant discovery, it availed so little that I could soon distinguish the rustling of leaves and crackling of dry branches, and presently after, the measured bounds of the panther struck plain upon my ear and to my heart. When it seemed to my frightened fancy that I could almost feel the monster's hot breath upon me, and see in the dark, the glare of his eyeballs, I procured a temporary reprieve by dropping one quarter of my fine buck, which I had intended for a far different purpose. However, I well knew that he would delay only to return with increased ferocity after his repast. I quickened my pace, if that were possible, straining every nerve with a faint hope of gaining the edge of the wood before I was again placed in so dangerous a vicinity to my purpose, but in vain; I could soon distinguish again his lengthened bounds, each one bringing him nearer and nearer.

When he approached so near that I considered him too familiar, I again baited him with my venison. This I did till my load was gone; and, instead of being satisfied, the fierce animal seemed but to have sharpened his appetite for a richer repast. When I had dropped the last remaining fragment, my means of defence or escape seemed to have been exhausted. However, I resolved to climb with all haste into the first tree that would admit of it, and defend myself as well as I could with the sole charge in the rifle. By good fortune I immediately discovered one which answered my purpose very well. It was of middling size, and destitute of branches for some twenty or thirty feet from the ground. I found no difficulty in climbing it with gun in hand, as my short sojourn in the country had made me quite an adept at any such indispensable accomplishments.

I had no sooner seated myself on the first bough, ready with my gun, than I could hear my late acquaintance bounding forward again, and soon, by the dim light that had enabled me to discover the tree, discerned his form alternately ascending and descending, leaping high into the air, and it seemed to me, full twenty feet forward each time. I did not in the least puzzle his sagacity to comprehend that the trail he was following came to a very abrupt conclusion; for after running several times round the tree, he finally settled himself down beneath, and raised such a tremendous yell that in spite of all my attempts to wear a brave heart and yield as little as possible to terror, this with the long and quivering cry of the approaching pack, could not but run like iron through my blood. Much to my astonishment, the wolves seemed content to occupy the back ground. This was soon explained by the appearance of another panther. These two formidable enemies occupied the ground alone, while the murderous but cowardly wolves slunk back into the woods.

Upon this new arrival, the two seemed for a short time to be holding an infernal council. Soon one of them started and ran off, while the other remained crouching beneath the tree. I was at a loss to comprehend precisely what this movement might import, though I could in any case only remain quiet, with my rifle ready poised. It was difficult to resist the temptation of firing at the remaining one, but I resolved to preserve my last charge in case of a greater emergency.

I now had leisure to plan every method of escape that my invention could devise. Other reflections by no means so pleasant would persist in intruding themselves. I had retained this position but a few minutes when I heard a slight crackle of a dry branch in another tree, distant two or three rods from the one I was in. I darted my eyes in that direction, and there, crouched on a limb a little higher than the one I rested on, I could plainly see the other panther in the very act of springing upon me. Quick as thought I drew up my rifle and fired. The sudden glare shot far into the bosom of dim night, and lit up the woods for a moment like a flash of lightning. I could fancy it reflected from a thousand wild eyes that were gleaming in anxious expectancy upon me.

But there was slight opportunity for reflection. As the panther, at the moment I fired, was on the point of springing, the impetus sent him forward and downward, so that he struck his claw upon the limb where my feet rested. For a moment he struggled to retain his grasp, and then fell dying to the ground. The other panther set up a dismal howl, and then started off in a similar manner with the first, and I doubted not, with a similar intention. As soon therefore, as he was out of sight, I slipped hastily from the tree, throw away my rifle, and started with all the speed desperation could lend. I ran down the brook, that being my only hope—though my heart told me that even that was but slight.

I could soon perceive by the howling that the wolves were again in fresh pursuit. I had run on now for near a half an hour, keeping in advance of the wolves, who had not the courage to attack me, when I again heard the measured bound of the panther. My heart sunk within me, and I was almost in despair, when I thought I caught a glimpse of the sky through the trees before me. I now strained every nerve, inwardly praying that this might be the case. If it was, I knew I was safe; otherwise, I could see no probable way of escape. The panther seemed to be aware of the necessity of putting forth a last effort, and gained upon me even faster than before. I could not turn to look, but I was well aware that every leap brought him nearer to me. At last I reached some thick fir, and one bound from them brought me in the open moonlight. There was a house not fifty rods from the place where I was. I knew the place at a glance. It was a mill upon the brook I had followed, situated about ten miles from my uncle's house whence I started. The panther, followed me half way to the house, towards which I struck with all speed. As I burst open the door and found that I was so quickly transported from the most imminent danger to a place of security, the

revulsion of my feelings was so powerful that I fell headlong upon the floor in a swoon. However, I was among friends and lacked no cordial attention, and the next day was ready to hunt again—taking the precaution, however, to examine my powder flask before I started. S. G. J. Middlebury, Vt. April 26, 1839.

AN UNCOMMON ESCAPE.

In Heath's Book of Beauty for 1839, is a very clever tale by George Irvine, Esq., entitled "The Lady of the Lattice." The hero of this tale is the Chevalier de Vevancourt, who finds himself a political prisoner, in the chateau of an old jealous Governor, who has a wife. His escape is singular enough.

In this pleasant abode, Vevancourt underwent the proper formulary of fetters, black bread, dirty water, &c. &c., according to the most approved receipts usually in such cases. His cell, which was situated under the platform of the keep, was vaulted with solid masonry, the walls were of the depressing thickness, and the four itself hung apparently over a precipice. Escape seemed totally out of the question.

One morning the turnkey, whose office it was to bring the prisoner his daily miserable pittance, instead of leaving him after having deposited it on his wooden table, remained standing before him with his arms folded, and regarding him with a singular expression. Their conversation was in general confined to a very few words, and was never commenced by his keeper. Vevancourt was therefore not a little surprised, when the man said to him—

"Sir, you no doubt, have your reasons for calling yourself Mons. Lestere. I have nothing to do with that; it is not my business to verify your title; you may call yourself Peter or Paul, for all I care, but I know (here he gave a most knowing wink with the left eye,) that you are M. Theodore Amadee Francois Chevalier de Vevancourt, and cousin of Madame la duchesse de Maille. Well!" added he, with an air of triumph, after a moment of silence, and looking friendly at the prisoner.

"And," said Vevancourt, who thought that his position could not be made much worse than it was already by the avowal of his proper name, "suppose I am the Chevalier de Vevancourt, what good will that do you?"

"All the good in the world," answered the turnkey, in a low voice. "Hark, ye, I have been handsomely tipped to assist your escape. Stop a minute, as I shall be shot if I am suspected of the least thing, I have decided that I would not meddle with the business one jot further than just sufficient to gain my money. Look you sir, here is the key." At these words he produced a small file. "With this," continued he, "you can cut through any of these bars, the door will not be over wide, to be sure." He pointed to the spoke to one of the narrow apertures by which the light was admitted to the dungeon. "Now you see you must saw off one of those bars, near enough to the bottom to allow you to pass."

"Oh never mind!" said Vevancourt. "I'll manage to get through."

"But you must have enough of the iron to tie the rope to."

"Here is it!"

"Has answered the turnkey, producing a rope knotted at intervals. "It is supposed to be iron, as you see in order, that it may be thought you made it yourself out of your own hands; it is of the grossest stuff. When you get to the last link, let yourself fall gently down—the rest is your own look-out. I have some reason to believe, you will find near the spot a carriage with horses ready put too, and friends who expect you. That I know nothing about of course. By-the-by I forgot to mention, that there is a sentinel just on the right of the tower, who will send a musket ball right through your head to a dead certainty, if he sees you. However you will choose a good dark night, you run some risk, but—"

"Good!" cried the Chevalier; "at all events, I shall not die here like a dog."

"Why, I don't know," drawled the goather, with a stupid look, "that may happen nevertheless." Vevancourt, in joy at the prospect of escape, had no time to pay attention to this silly sounding observation of one who appeared a nonsensical boor; he instantly set to work, and spent the whole day in filing through the bar.

Thinking however, that the Commandant might pay a visit, in person, he took care to conceal the effects of his labor, by filling the incision with the crumbs of bread rolled in the rust, so as to give it the color of iron, and then waited for a night that should suit his purpose, with concentrated impatience of mind.

At length, during a dark autumnal night he completed his operation.—The bar was sawn through, the chord firmly attached to it, and Vevancourt having with some difficulty, squeezed himself through the opening, waited, with his feet, on part of the masonry, which projected beneath the window, and his hands tightly grasping the end of the bar which remained, for the most obscure part of the night, and that hour at which your watchful sentinel is generally fast asleep, that is, to say, two hours before day-break. Being well acquainted with the duration of the different watches, and the times at which the guards went the rounds, circumstances which prisoners, even involuntarily, silently occupy themselves in ascertaining, he watched the moment when about three-quarters of the duty of the sentinel nearest had expired, and the man himself, sunk in his box to avoid the fog, then feeling certain that he had united all the chances most favorable for his evasion, he began to descend knot by knot, suspended between the heaven and earth, but clutching the cord with the strength of a giant.

All appeared to be going on prosperously, he had already arrived at the last knot but one, when just as he was about to let himself slide off on the earth, he thought it would be more prudent to feel for the ground with his feet, but no ground was to be felt.

This was not altogether encouraging, he was baffled in sweat, fatigued, perplexed, and in a situation where his life depended on a mere toss-up; he was on the point of taking all the chances and leaping down, when a gust of wind blew off his hat luckily he listened for the noise he expected it to make in falling, and on hearing nothing, a vague suspicion of his situation struck him and he began