

GROPING FOR HEALTH IN THE MAMMOTH CAVE.

In looking through The Filson Club's unpublished documents for something that would be of interest in connection with the transfer last month of the Mammoth Cave National Park, we found a letter in the Orlando Brown papers which was written to Mr. Brown on the 21st of December, 1842, by A. H. P. Anderson. It was written at Pensico Cottage inside the cave and posted at Prewitt's Knob, Kentucky, which at that time must have been the post office of that neighborhood but which at the present day would be considered some distance away.

In a book entitled *Rambles in the Mammoth Cave during the Year 1884*, by a Visitor [Dr. John Croghan] (Morton & Griswold, Louisville, Ky. 1845), the author states, "A knowledge of the curative properties of the cave air, is not, as is generally supposed, of recent date, it has long been known." He then goes ahead to show that it is always tempered, its air is pure, and its effect on the spirits of visitors is strengthening; and to clinch his argument says that oxen that have been used in the cave in connection with the production of niter keep in the finest condition. About 1840 arrangements were made for those suffering with tuberculosis who wished to try the "curative" properties of the cave to do so. Dr. Croghan says:

"Immediately beyond the Great Bend, a row of cabins, built for consumptive patients, commences. All of these are framed buildings, with exception of two, which are of stone. They stand in line, from thirty to one hundred feet apart, exhibiting a picturesque, yet at the same time, a gloomy and mournful appearance."

Dr. W. Stump Forwood in his book, *An Historical and Descriptive Narrative of the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky* (J.

Orlando Brown, 1801-1867 was born in Frankfort, Kentucky, the son of Senator John Brown and wife Margaretta Mason. He was a graduate of Princeton, studied medicine under his uncle Dr. Preston W. Brown. Not liking it, he read law and began its practice in Alabama but returned in 1833 to Kentucky where he became joint proprietor and editor of the *Frankfort Commonwealth*. He was Secretary of State for Kentucky and Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the United States. His birth place, "Liberty Hall" is one of the show places of our State. The Misses Annie H. and Mary Watts Brown, daughters of his son Orlando, Jr., presented part of their grandfather's papers to The Filson Club in 1942. They still live in the old home at Frankfort.

B. Lippincott & Co., Philadelphia. 1870), tells us what happened in the following language:

"The majority of those who remained any considerable length of time died within periods varying from three days to three weeks after leaving it. Those patients who remained in the Cave three or four months presented a frightful appearance. The face was entirely bloodless, eyes sunken, and pupils dilated to such a degree that the iris ceased to be visible so that, no matter what the original color of the eye might have been, it soon appeared black."

The following (unedited) letter gives the experiences and the feelings of one of the unfortunate consumptives who tried the cure. Needless to say the absence of sunlight was fatal to all of them.

THE LETTER

Penseco Cottage, M: Cave,
21 Decr. 1842

Very dear Sir:

If the thought has crossed your mind that I have forgotten the circumstances of our parting and the happiness you conferred upon me, let it be banished forever; the visit was to have been one of observation only & I had so far made it such as to be at Bill's on my return home when I unexpectedly met my bro. & his wife from Nashville, who had hurried thither purposely to intercept me; they were only in time, the same Coach would have conveyed me to Louisville; we all returned to reexamine this wonderful nether territory and determine anew upon the propriety or impropriety of a residence in it for health. We remained at the Cave Hotel two days & then were so well pleased that it was resolved that I should try it and further that it was inexpedient and hurtful to me to travel home and back again by stage, encountering two or three nights in the trip; I therefore from prudential motives remained.

The season, except a few days about the time of my leaving home, proved delightful; never were the glories of rich and varying autumn more enjoyed; there was nothing to mar it. Company came along at intervals of agreeable cast and visits

to the Cave or rambling in the barrens culling the wild flowers or enjoying the agreeable society of visitors at the house gave speed to the bright hours and for a month I almost forgot I had concealed in my bosom that distressing malady and vigour claimed place in my before feeble body and life resumed its charms; I again felt that keen desire for its fuller enjoyment that returning health alone imparts and willing to endure any present inconveniences and disturbances of the dearest ties of our nature to possess it; and with cheerful feelings and bright hopes of protection at least, I entered my underground residence on the 20th of October, the weather being cool enough to make the temperature of the Cave feel agreeable and the place more inviting than if contrasted with the lovely weather of an earlier date. For a short time another invalid and myself were the sole tenants, he had been in from the time of my arrival, and I had had some difficulty in making bright hours out of dark ones; I had my cottage, pavillion or cabin as you please, a room 12 by 18 feet of upright boards tongued and grooved and floored of the same and covered with canvass stretched over the top, placed beyond my fellow residents about a quarter of a mile and (as we have since measured with a tape Line) just 3000 feet from the entrance door in a very rugged place; this I did for advantage in temperature, gaining about 2° and at this season 4° as the former is under the influence of the inward current of air; the road first employed me and I worked some days at it to make it comfortable and pass off time; by and by others came and settled along side of me and I was no longer lonesome, my correspondents too in compassion supplied me with plenty of news and a life in the Cave appeared less dreary; I felt some symptoms of a cold in the first week which is the experience of every invalid or other person accompanying them, yet I felt stronger and took exercise freely, preserved a good appetite and seemed in the ascendant decidedly in the line of health; in the mean time the increase of fires caused an accumulation of smoke, which in consequence of the equal temperature without and within (58°) rested in a stagnant atmosphere about the spot where generated, filled the whole avenue and became intolerably oppressive, aggravating my cough and consequently all my bad

symptoms; this I endured two nights as if in a smoke house and was so seriously injured by it that but for a favourable change of weather and a movement in the air should have left; the weather was again unsettled and came up to our temperature about two weeks after causing the same difficulty and I again thought of leaving and wrote to intercept my baggage at Louisville, which coming to the ears of Dr. Croghan, he desired that I should not under any circumstances leave before he came down in a few days; on his arrival I requested him as he was building rooms to give me another and put it up by itself in Pensco Avenue almost half a mile from my residence (or the main Cave) which he promptly acceded to and since that I am here and make my own smoke and am not annoyed with that of others or the noise of a thickly settled Cave village, sometimes very great when one would like to sleep. I enjoy also a walk of $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to the dining room affording of necessity 3 m. pr day for exercise; there are now ten invalids in the Cave and four others the companions of some and one child about four years old; I am not sure that any one has grown better but all concur in the opinion that they would be worse out and hence contentment generally pervades our little community. We all use stoves, I have the best, an air tight one of my own ordering; each is provided with a thermometer and the temperature of the rooms kept as low as the invalid can bear it; mine is generally about 64 Fah: about 12° lower than I could bear it last winter at home; the air is very tonic and fine for exercising, manifestly imparting strength; its humidity is fine for the lungs, and its equable temp'e and quiet, pure character makes always a favourable impression and I think justly.

There are many things however to be done to render this place entirely pleasant and to give its virtues a fair test; we are pioneers under all the disadvantages of such and after generations will reap the benefit of our experiment as I have no doubt this will divest the question of doubt and pave the way to improvements and its enjoyment under them by the afflicted world; it could not be known what were the wants of the Cave before this test, it is now manifest that a shaft is necessary to ventilate it and carry off the smoke and precautions for the preservation of a pure air and many things not

necessary to name. Some of the invalids eat at their pavillions while others in better health attend regularly the table d'hôte which is very good indeed, having a considerable variety and being almost daily (I've noticed but two or three omissions) graced with a saddle of venison and other game. Our hours are those of the upper world indicated by our watches; a taper burns at night and two stearine lights in the day; we walk with lamps furnished with lard oil and I seldom hear daylight mentioned and for myself seldom think of it; the endless interest of this novel place keeps us rambling and when fatigued, books, papers or letters or social visits fill up the time. I have had a considerable and progressive cold for some time and could find nothing in the cave to impute it to, being careful and regular in my ways and doings, until accidentally I discovered that my bed was damp; I had suspected it but could not demonstrate it & there it rested until overhauling some things under it I found them literally wet and my shoes mouldy. I at once thought I should leave (day before yesterday) and risque a trip home rather than die here, but Dr. Croghan to whom I imparted my discovery promptly, offered to remove my cottage to any other point or to have my room thoroughly dried and my bedding daily exposed to the warm air of the stove by suspending each piece from the ceiling bars; the latter I concluded to try and already feel better and think it is probable I shall remain; the weather is so bad out and I know the consequences of exposure would be perhaps fatal and certainly bad. I sometimes despite all my exertions to preserve cheerful feelings feel sad and desire above all things to return home again but again the hope of benefit and the anticipated pleasures of home when I am benefited in a more genial season too, come to my relief and strengthen me for the trial of absence and its regrets. We have every Sabbath the services of the Episcopal Church read and a sermon also selected from some good author.

I thought I should have given you some better idea of Cave life, but my sheet I find is waning and I have said but little to picture it; as to a description of the Cave, that is unnecessary, hundreds have been written and published of superficial character to be sure, but mine could be no more and on this

account particularly I should hesitate; if one cannot for want of a knowledge of the several sciences enjoy the rich store that lies buried here how could he with intelligence impart an idea of it to others? many have essayed to do so but a mortifying failure is the return. Prof. Locke of Cin'a has been lecturing on the Subject after a minute and critical examination of it and I could not enter the field after him so I beg you will procure his lectures and I have no doubt you will find them full of interest. His has made discoveries here not before known in geology and will no doubt give the place by his investigation more celebrity than it ever had and at the same time make a correct impression on the mind of the public which has ever been gulled with exaggerations or failures in fair representation. For the most part all the distances here have been greatly exaggerated & we (some two or three invalids) have proven it by actual measurement; nevertheless it is one of Nature's greatest wonders and one of its avenues (Cleaveland's) from which I will bring some specimens home, laughs at all descriptive terms or the artists pencil; other places may be and are exaggerated, but this can never be on account of its peculiar and wonderful formations, in Gypsum, called Oulaphylites, or curling leaf stone by Prof. L; in that avenue the pen is paralysied and the Visiter mute in wonder and admiration. Adieu, give my best respects to the judge and write to me

Yrs. ever

A. H. P. ANDERSON